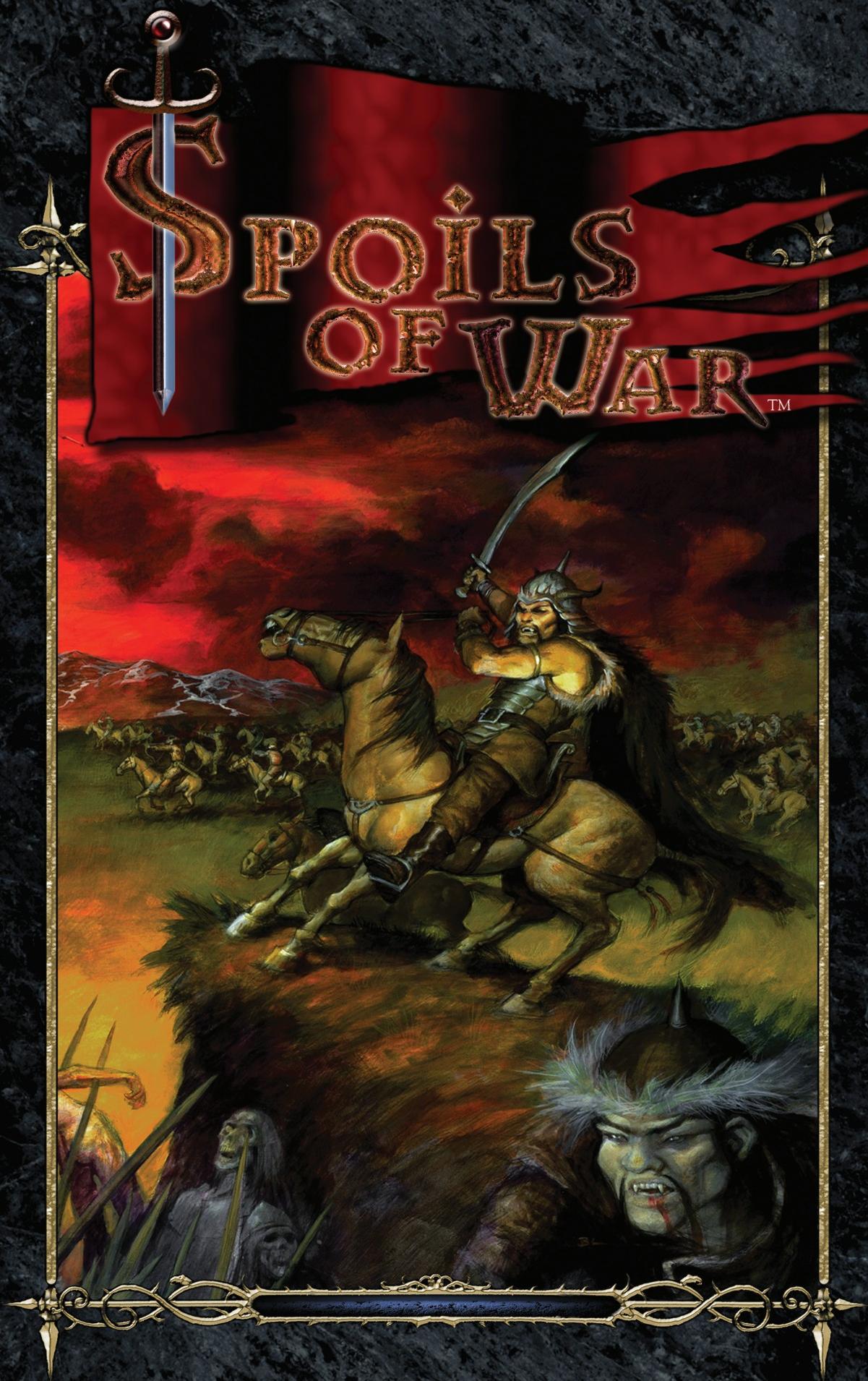
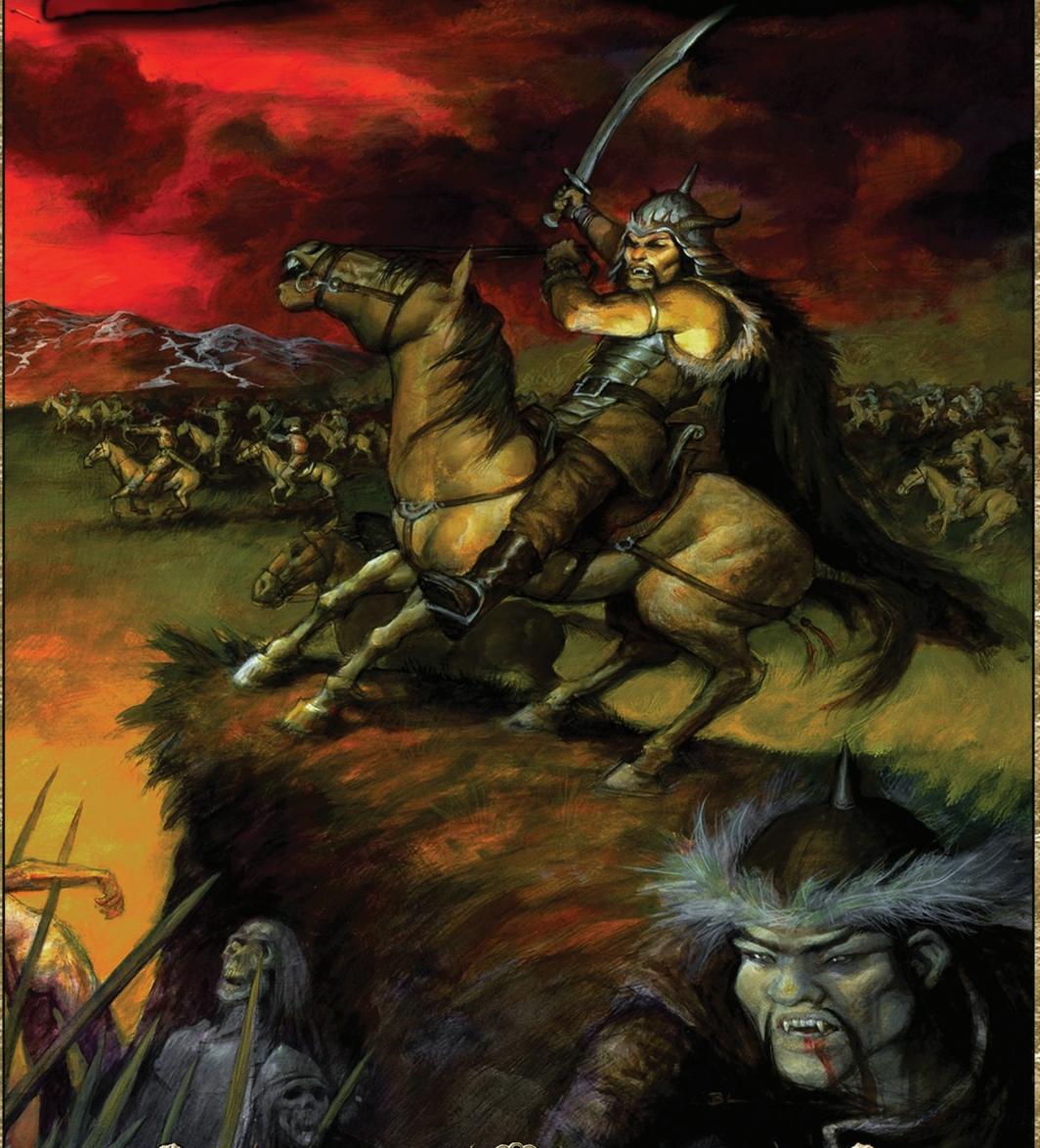
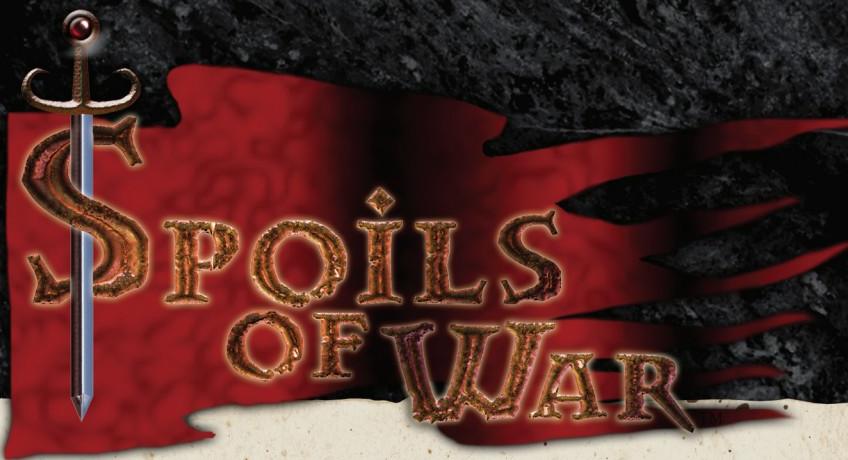


# SPOILS OF WAR

TM





## TO THE VICTORS GO THE SPOILS

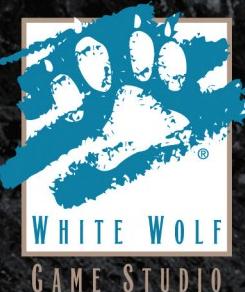
Whether it's a Holy War or battle of succession, strife brings opportunity. The inhabitants of the Dark Medieval™, mortal and supernatural, are rarely satisfied with what they have. Call it what you like — a righteous cause or an ancient grudge — war is hell, but the rewards can be worth the risks. Do you have the courage, the intelligence and the skill to lead an army to victory?

## THE VICTOR WRITES HISTORY

Dark Ages: Spoils of War is the sister title to Right of Princes™ and contains information on how to raise an army, attack and overtake a foe's holdings, and beat an enemy through stealth, diplomacy and assassination. It contains information on both the historical and supernatural applications of war in the Dark Medieval and how players can turn these weapons to their characters' advantage.

## SPOILS OF WAR INCLUDES:

- o Information suitable for all four major races — vampires, mages, inquisitors and werewolves — on the waging of war
- o Revisions to the mass combat system and weapons charts
- o The "sample domains" from Right of Princes revisited — and torn down





By Chris Hartford, Ari Marmell, Lisa J. Steele  
and C. David Wendig

Vampire created by Mark Rein-Hagen

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## Special Testosterone-Laden Thanks

Geoffrey "Not in the face! Not in the face!" Goodwin, for taking it easy on me.

Michael "Cannibal Maniac" Goodwin, for not severing my leg. Stupid ninja.

Beau "I won! Eat it, bitch!" Brown, for sportsmanlike conduct.

Ryan "No, I won!" Carden, for accepting defeat, or at least a tie, gracefully.

Jay "Uhhh... I'm the ref..." Self, for making the attempt, despite the fact that he couldn't see straight.

Ryan "Ninja for a Night" Cutshall, for remaining my friend even after I dragged him to this silliness.

Pirates rule! Yarrr!

## Ye Olde Errata:

D.M. Foster was inadvertently left out of the art credits for Right of Princes. We apologize. Ya know we love ya, Matt.



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# LEGENDS OF THE GAROU

## The Beast of War

The air smelled of rot and foulness. Geoffrey Three-Branched stood atop a rock outcropping, staring down over the emerald folds of land that culminated in a small verdant valley. At the bottom of the valley, in the very creases of earth, a small encampment of a dozen or so makeshift tents sat scattered, orbiting a few ashen cookfires and bedrolls. Even from here, he could see the bodies lying about, dark shapes strewn in the grass. And the smell ... he didn't bother covering his mouth or nose. It was a malodorous reminder of what was to come. Of the new world that struggled to be born.

He looked to the small Mongol cub, Sings-Softly. The boy stood, his eyes alive with excitement and fear, waiting for something, anything at all. He stood silently; Geoffrey did not know whether the young one couldn't speak at all or simply chose not to.

"Go to the camp," Geoffrey said, pointing down to the valley. "Scout for me. Mind the smell, try to scent past it. Afterward, you'll tell me what you learned. I'll be down soon."

The boy grinned a wolfish, snaggle-toothed smile, hoisted his rusty Danish axe with a grunt and took off running.

He waited until the boy was small in his vision and cleared his throat. "I know you're there. I caught your musk last night during moonrise."

Moments passed with no movement. Then came the faint footpads and clicks of claws on rock, and a lean, lanky wolf with sharp-angled haunches and a long, narrow jaw descended and sidled up next to Geoffrey. The wolf turned a dark eye toward the man and began circling the rock outcropping like a snake.

"Here to plunder?" the lupus asked in an utterance of languid growls. The man took a restrained breath and stepped off the rock, cutting off the wolf's pacing circumnavigation. Known in wolf-speech as a series of throaty snarls, other Garou called him "Thistletongue."

"I have kin who died," Geoffrey said curtly.

"Ah, yes," the Talon said, eyes glittering. "You have seeded many of the human cows, haven't you?" The lupus snorted and panted. "When was the last time you had a wolf, hmm?"

Geoffrey scowled. "Watch your tongue. My kin are my own business. The ones here were simple people, commoners working for the knights below. Cooks. Blade-sharpeners." Three-Branch stared nails through the lupus. "They were good people made dead in war, so I come to bury."

"War?" Thistletongue yipped a laugh. "Gaians and your naïveté. This was not war, not *proper* war. Even I admit that sometimes there is honor in battle, human or no, but where is the honor in this ugly charade?"

"Say it, don't dance around your words."

"Can't you smell it? That death is not natural. It is not the smell of honorable bodies rotting in the sun. That's the stink of disease, carcasses bearing the fruits of sickness." The lupus leered; he seemed to be enjoying this.

"So illness felled them."

Thistletongue paused, cocking a narrow eye. "Yes. But it's much worse. The spirits say the corruption was brought by other two-legs in secret. This is the new face of the world, this is what happens when the hairless cattle are allowed to fumble and breed like half-witted pups."

"I'll hold my own counsel with the spirits," Geoffrey said.

"Do that, they'll tell you the same. It's time again to control the herd, limit their breeding. Don't tell me your ancestors aren't calling for the same, aren't feeding your tongue with the taste of their wayward blood—" Geoffrey felt his Rage claw to the surface like hot pitch, and before he could check himself, his arm had changed into a massive stretch of sinew and bristle. He wrapped his claws around Thistletongue's muzzle. He snapped the head backward sharply, exposing the throat. Under the Ragabash's jaw line, a pink scar ran in a hairless rift across the his throat.

"Haven't we had this conversation before?" Geoffrey seethed. "I'm sure you remember it." Letting go of his anger, he tossed the mangy Garou, bowling the creature backward. He rolled and leapt to his feet, then snarled. Geoffrey grunted. "Don't bother. You

know how this will end if you come at me. Another scar, and shame for the younger."

"There is a meeting," Thistletongue managed through clenched fangs. "In the north. Where the Borealis ends. Something of an informal moot, you see? We're discussing our options. Many have chosen to attend. I suggest you do as well."

"There's no reason," Geoffrey said, feeling the bones in his arm revert to their homid origin. "Go now, no-moon, leave me alone and take your ... diplomacy to another. I have the ghosts of my kin to attend to."

With that he left, following in the tracks of Sings-Softly.

\* \* \*

Thistletongue was right. Disease had murdered these people, sickness the weapon that felled these mercenary crusaders. Bodies were everywhere, bloated and black. Dark nodules ran the lengths of their swollen flesh, each pustule thick with sponge and blood. Spoiled bodies, ruined souls. Geoffrey stalked among them, the feculence crawling in his nose and mouth and making him want to gag. The black flies had found their meals, and grimly he thought, *At least someone is enjoying this.*

This was not the first time he'd seen what the malady had sown. A day's ride away, closer to the Toulouse border, a town called Lorris had fallen to this plague. Men and women wept and cried to Heaven as others called the affliction "God's justice." *Ignorance*, Geoffrey thought, is a far greater illness. The disease was like nothing he'd seen before. Those last moments, the townsfolk lay caught in the throes of a numbing frenzy of spasms and contractions until finally they died, their flesh cracked and dripping like that of an overcooked pig.

Here, it was somehow worse. Part of it was that these were simple people. Farmers, mostly, a few clothiers. They had picked up arms for their lord, a noble from the tower town of Lorris. They didn't receive honorable deaths. Battle did not bring them low as they fought for an oath or for fealty. This disease was an invisible enemy, one (if Thistletongue could be believed) conjured and brought by human magics. Could this sickness be brought to heel? Could it be controlled like a plow or a hammer? He shuddered at the thought.

The other part of it was that some of these men and women were his Kinfolk. They carried part of his spirit within them; they had some lingering recollec-

tion of the same ancestors. Here they had fallen. He saw a child, a boy barely old enough to have hair on his chest, his face planted in the ashen remains of a cookfire. the body bent in awkward angles. Flies danced upon the viscous humors that ran weeping down his split and shirtless back. This wasn't dignity.

Sings-Softly came out of a tattered tent-flap nearby and gestured inside with his axe. The Mongol boy had found his Kin's tent. Good, Geoffrey thought. *It is time to say a proper goodbye.*

\* \* \*

Rats chewed skin from a man's brow. The man was large, his body still, the belly distended. In the corner of the darkened tent, a woman sat, her body draped across the breadth of an anvil, her teeth clenched with a black tongue caught between them. Across the tent, Geoffrey saw two children: a girl of perhaps five, and an infant. The girl had died cradling the baby, and together they looked like bloated manikins, a simulacrum of destroyed life. Flies hummed about.

"My kin," Geoffrey whispered, and tears burned at the corners of his eyes while his skin crawled. His brethren, he thought, and blinked away the tears before they fell. He didn't know these people, at least not well. He knew so little of his Kinfolk, not even their names, but they were everywhere. *The line must continue*, a voice said inside him. *The ancestors call for it.*

This horror made him reconsider. Despair tugged at him at times like these, and he questioned seriously whether it was worth it. Was this the future? Was this the harvest that would be reaped? Why bring new cubs into a place so easily poisoned and defiled? Did their fight matter at all? He wasn't so sure anymore.

A wooden cup clattered to the floor and bounced off an iron cook skewer, and Geoffrey spun around. It was just Sings-Softly, who was pointing at something on the tent wall, grunting and gesturing. Geoffrey looked to see where he was pointing.

In rusty red, smeared across the tent cloth, were two words.

Bestia Bellum.

"Latin," Geoffrey said. "Beast of War." That didn't make any sense, he thought. These people weren't clergy or royalty. Every one of them was illiterate. So if his kin didn't write this ... he spoke the rest out loud: "Who did?"

He heard the shuffle of flesh and fabric behind him, but by the time he spun, it was too late. The man, one of his own Kinfolk, buried a wood hatchet in Geoffrey's shoulder. The Gaian staggered backward, pulling the weapon from his flesh, and looked at his dead relation. The eyes ran with syrupy blood, the pupils distant and unfocused. Still the corpse shambled forward, mouth opening and closing like that of a dying fish. Words hissed out, like air leaking from a wine bladder: "Bestia Bellum."

Up off the anvil, the woman rose. Her tongue lolled from her mouth, too swollen to fit back inside her lips. Geoffrey backpedaled more, and suddenly Sings-Softly was there, beside him and at the ready, the axe poised to swing. Geoffrey caught the axe heft, shook his head. "No. Not yet. Please."

The man and woman lunged. Geoffrey lifted his arms to shield himself but they were faster than he expected, and stronger, too. Their force matched his own, and a cold fear grappled his spine. He felt the change begin, felt the feral bristles push from his pores, and he pushed the two attackers back, and they staggered like drunken puppets into one another, white pus running from black wounds. Sings-Softly made a noise of alarm, and Geoffrey turned to see the little girl standing there, her hair stringy and matted like weeds around her pallid face and her wormy lips turned to a smile.

"Bestia Bellum," she hissed.

Her mouth opened, and dark bile poured out in a fountain onto his chest and began to burn. He felt clumps of fur still attached to skin peel and drop away like dead flesh. He howled, felt fear and fury overwhelm him, and he staggered backward through the tent, tearing back out through the flap and tripping over a set of rocks, landing on his broadening back.

He tried to stave off the wrath inside of him, felt it tapering off into a manageable state ... but then he saw them, once-human shadows staggering closer, beginning to circle him. All the dead were there, standing at attention; some had weapons, others their bare hands. They were whispering, murmuring the same words over and over again, teeth clacking together. *Beast-of-War*, Geoffrey thought, and he knew that this foretold a grave future.

They descended upon him, and his Rage was unstoppable.

He leapt to standing, the awful pain in his chest fading to a dull itch. They attacked, but they were insects to him, rag dolls caught in a hurricane of razors



and pain. His claws made short work of limbs and heads, his teeth tasted the grim humors that gushed from their ruined bodies. That terrible foulness on his tongue only enraged him further. Somewhere in the whirlwind of blood and anger, he saw the Mongol boy stepping atop their heads like a lithe and nimble dancer, swinging the axe with quiet grace. An iron cook pot thrust upward into Geoffrey's jaw. His teeth clashed together over his tongue. It only fueled the raw blister of anger deep within him, and he felt a guttural howl burst from his throat as Sings-Softly fought silently on, his axe carving dark carpentry through dead flesh. Only more death was to be had, some small voice said in the back of Geoffrey's head, and he couldn't see the boy anymore, only mud, disease, his own Rage.

\* \* \*

Twilight arrived, and it was done.

He lay near the long-forgotten cookfire, wearing his natural Homid form, staring numbly down at the wound on his chest. The flesh blistered as if burned; the glistening, skinless parts were already crusting over with an unhealthy layer of scab. The injury did not smell right, either. It had a strange stink to it, an odor that spoke of more than disease. He idly looked around at all the bodies scattered about and destroyed. His own hands dripped with ichor, and under his fingernails were pieces of necrotic skin. He felt sick.

Sings-Softly sat on a rock nearby, scraping a flat stone against the blade of his axe, letting fly a few white sparks. As he worked, he occasionally looked up and over at Geoffrey with a look of concern, and Geoffrey didn't know what to do, so he merely looked away.

A wind kicked up, ruffling his hair and beard. It also blew the smell away for a second and cooled his wound. The damage he had suffered was not permanent. It would heal over time, with rest and some time communing with the spirits. What had come from the little girl's mouth ... he shuddered at the thoughts. The physical wounds would heal, but the scar that the image left as it burned upon his mind would never heal.

"You want to know who did this," a growling voice came from off to his left, "but I have no answers."

It was the lupus, Thistletongue. He crept closer, winding his way through the dismembered corpses.

"I didn't scent you this time," Geoffrey mumbled. "Even your musky haunches don't stink quite as bad compared to the horror this place wreaks upon the nose."

The lupus ignored the comment. "The spirits say little about all of this. They're scared, you know. Too scared to share with us the truth behind this nightmare. But this was purposeful, remember that. Men wrought this upon other men. War has cast an ugly shadow across this place, and what you see here is the true result, the face of what-is-to-come. This horror is no bedtime story to tell to the pups so they piss their fur. This is the world of your precious human kin."

Thistletongue caught sight of a fat green fly circling his head. His ears twitched, and gleefully he shot his head up and snapped his jaws upon the insect. He crunched merrily, and he had a strange light in his eyes, as if to say "I told you so."

"*Sic transit gloria mundi*," Geoffrey muttered. *Thus passes the glory of the world*, he thought sadly. He almost laughed.

"Squirrel chatter," the Talon commented. "All your two-leg words sound like squirrel chatter." The wolf spat out a pair of wings distastefully. "Why you don't change to your wolf self and stay there is beyond me. Regardless, men approach. They'll be here before long. Men with crosses, on horses. Abominations if you ask me, and surely they'll have questions to ask about all of this."

Groaning, Geoffrey stood. The scabs on his chest cracked and bled, and he winced. He nodded over at Sings-Softly, who hopped up and bounded over dutifully.

"Thistletongue," Geoffrey said. "You say there's a meeting."

The lupus nodded. "By the Borealis, yes. There's a caern. It's—"

"I know of it," Geoffrey said, interrupting. "You've already been promised attendance from others?"

"Many others. Kettil Cleft-Foot of the Fenrir, the Silent Strider called King-of-Circles. Next I go to the woman's camp, further south, to see if I can call the Furies to arms."

Geoffrey snorted. "Never heard of the Strider, but Cleft-Foot's a war-maker."

"It's time to make war," the lupus said, his fangs stretching out in the mockery of a smile.

"Perhaps. I don't agree with what you're suggesting. That time is long gone. We no longer control

them, we can't make new walls and expect them to stay standing. These aren't cattle. Not anymore. They're clever. They build castles, and engines of war. Gaia has accepted them as her children."

"And as her *children*," he snarled the word with contempt, "grow more cunning, so does the Corruptor. They will destroy her one day, but we can do something. We can stop them."

"Maybe. Not in the manner you suggest, I find. But a compromise may be had."

The lupus chuckled in the back of his throat. "Compromise. Of course."

"I'll be there," Geoffrey said, finally. "I'll meet you and the others at the caern when the time is right. Watch yourself in the meantime. I no longer trust

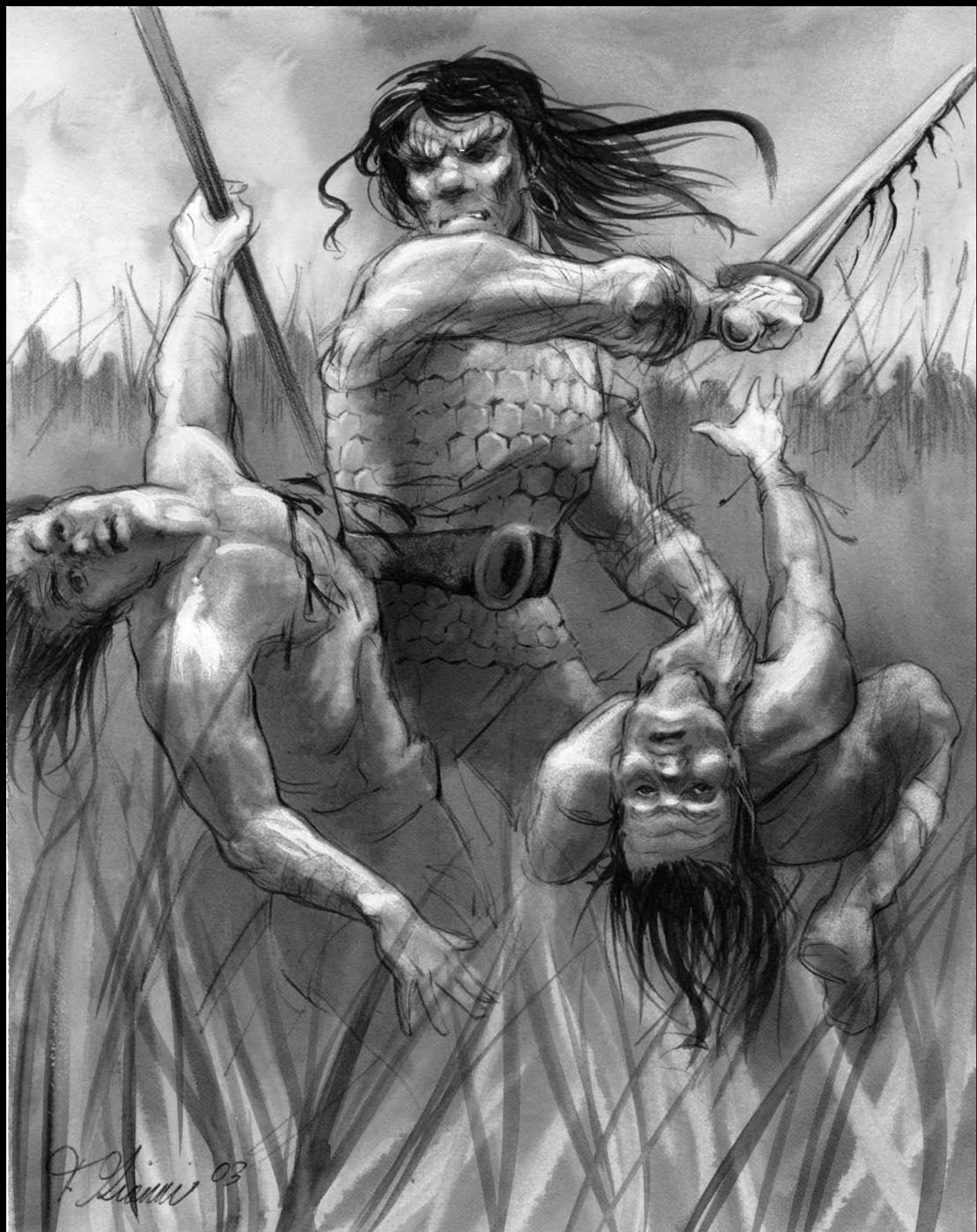
things as I once did." Thistletongue said nothing, merely nodded his narrow head and padded off between two tents. Then he was gone.

Sings-Softly stared up at Geoffrey.

"The world is changing," he said to the Mongol cub. "Of that there is no doubt. It's time we track this poison to its source, or we're all meat for the cookfire." He stared down at his blood-soaked hands. "Gaia bless us all. We need to travel fast. There is much to be done, support to be gained. I only hope it isn't too late."

The two fell to the ground, their bodies already changing to the wolf forms they would wear for the long journey ahead. They ran from the encampment, the aroma of foulness clinging to their fur.





F. Manzi 03

# INTRODUCTION

“In marriage, as in war, it is permitted to take every advantage of the enemy.”

— Anonymous

Looking back over the history of the world, it might see easiest to take as given that people have and always will do horrible things to each other. Arguably, the ultimate expression of this horror is that of war. Masses of people meet on the field of battle to inflict bloody murder upon each other, sometimes for goals as lofty as saving souls or defending homes, but more often for profit, resources or sheer hatred.

As the years wear on, humanity only becomes better at the art of war, and the supernatural inhabitants of the Dark Medieval can scarcely fail to notice. They might shake their heads in dismay at the humans' folly or seek to profit at the carnage. They might leap into the battle headlong, adopt human causes as their own (or, conversely, seek to steer human wars toward their own agendas, although as the Fourth Crusade proved, humans do as they will and not even the most canny Cainite can completely subvert them). Each such being, from the vampire who feeds upon the blood of the fallen to the inquisitor who hears the confessions of the dying, has a place within the battles and struggles of mankind.

And, naturally, in the spoils of said battles.

# Crows to Carrion

**Spoils of War** examines the art of making war in the 13th century. More specifically, it examines how characters in the various **Dark Ages** games might practice that art, their places within an army, what goals they could serve by fighting (or at least following the battles) and how these wars are fought.

This book assumes the characters are taking the offensive. Defending and building a homestead is all very well, but many of the prime choices for such homesteads are already taken. This means that invasion is in order (although usually under another pretext — few warlords are willing to admit the truth of their actions). **Spoils of War** discusses how to invade, destroy and plunder and makes very few excuses for such actions.

Does that mean that characters who take part in sieges should face no repercussions? Of course not. Cainites have the most obvious consequences; most roads will be tested by the act of charging onto the battlefield (whether because of the inhumanity involved in killing or the suicidal stupidity that such an action requires). Any supernatural being who takes part in a battle, however, might find that when the day (or night) has been won, other forces lurk in the newly won territory, forces that have no need of a human army to defend their sacred glens. Then the characters have an entirely different kind of fight on their hands ....

## Mortals

While vampires, werewolves, mages and inquisitors might take up arms occasionally, the vast majority of fighting is done by normal mortals. Crusaders, knights and conscripted peasants arm themselves and march off to death at the behest of their lords, and few stop to question if they have any other choice. But plunder awaits them at battle's end — and this fact is not lost on supernatural creatures who don't wish to dirty their hands.

## Vassals

**Right of Princes** introduced the concept of demesne Backgrounds, a collective term for the Backgrounds that encompass a physical space (Domain, Chantry, Chapter-House and Hunting Grounds). **Spoils of War** makes occasional reference to demesne Backgrounds and adds the notion of vassal Backgrounds. Vassal Backgrounds are those Traits that indicate the service of another being and include Retainers, Servants, Flock and Kinfolk.

## DARK MEDIEVAL

Like **Right of Princes** (this book's sister title), **Spoils of War** is meant for the entire **Dark Ages** line. This means that while the only book you need to have in order to understand and use **Spoils of War** is **Dark Ages: Vampire**, the information presented herein is just as useful for games of **Dark Ages: Mage**, **Inquisitor**, **Werewolf** or any other games released in the future.

## How to Use This Book

**Spoils of War** is a resource for Storytellers and players alike. Players might use it to gain an idea of what warfare, feudal duty and taking the Cross entail, which can provide hosts of ideas for character concepts and plot hooks. If the troupe wishes its characters to expand their holdings, the methods outlined in this book might be of some use (but beware, for the Storyteller has access to these strategies as well).

Storytellers might find setting a game in an army or a camp following very rewarding. The atmosphere is undeniably compelling — dirty, cramped, the threat of battle ever-present — and any sort of character might find a reason to march along with an army. Also, this book provides expansions and alternatives for the mass combat system found in the **Dark Ages Storytellers Companion**, as well as to the weapons and armor found in **Dark Ages: Vampire**.

## Chapter by Chapter

**Prelude: The Beast of War:** A pair of werewolves encounter the casualties of the new face of war.

**Introduction:** The part you're reading now.

**Chapter One: Duty and Steel.** This chapter discusses the reasons for going to war and the history of some of the greatest battles of the last few decades, and gives systems for leading troops, building and using siege engines, foraging for food and combat at sea.

**Chapter Two: Poisoned Quills** examines the shady side of war, including poison, disease and assassination. Diplomacy and inheritance (which can be just as shady) are also discussed.

**Chapter Three: Preparing for Battle** explores how to prepare an army, the elements of a medieval fighting force and its common equipment, the logistics of an army on the march and the most significant "conflict zones" in the Dark Medieval.

**Chapter Four: Ashes and Blood** revisits the four sample demesnes first detailed in **Right of Princes** ... and tears them down.

## Terms

**Bailey** (also Ward) — The enclosed space within the walls of a castle. Depending on the structure of the fortification, a castle may have several baileys.

**Barbican** — A defensive outwork designed to protect a gate.

**Bartizan** — A turret, usually serving as an observation point.

**Battlements** — The upper section of a wall. The vertical stone blocks that form crenellations are known as merlons, while the open part is called an embrasure. Embrasures are commonly covered with shutters to protect the defenders.

**Brattice** — A wooden hoarding built out from the battlements to shield defenders and to allow them to attack those below. See also machicolation.

**Concentric Castle** — A castle protected by several rings of walls, each of which must be penetrated to reach the core of the fortress.

**Curtain wall** — The main wall around the bailey. Usually broken up by towers.

**Gateway** — An entranceway, usually flanked by towers and protected by a portcullis.

**Greek Fire** — An incendiary preparation similar to modern-day napalm.

**Keep** — A massive stone tower or box, usually at the heart of a castle as a refuge.

**Mangonel** — A military engine similar to a catapult used for hurling stones and other missiles.

**Machicolation** — Brattices made of stone and incorporated into the structure of a wall or tower.

**Moat** — A ditch surrounding fortifications. May or may not be filled with water.

**Motte and Bailey** — A simple castle, involving an artificial mound (motte) atop which is a wooden or stone tower, surrounded by a wall.

**Murder Holes** — Openings in the ceiling of a passage (often the gateway) through which defenders can fire or pour boiling liquids onto an attacker below.

**Portcullis** — A wood or iron grille intended to restrict passage through a gateway.

**Postern** — A small gate through a wall, often concealed and well defended.

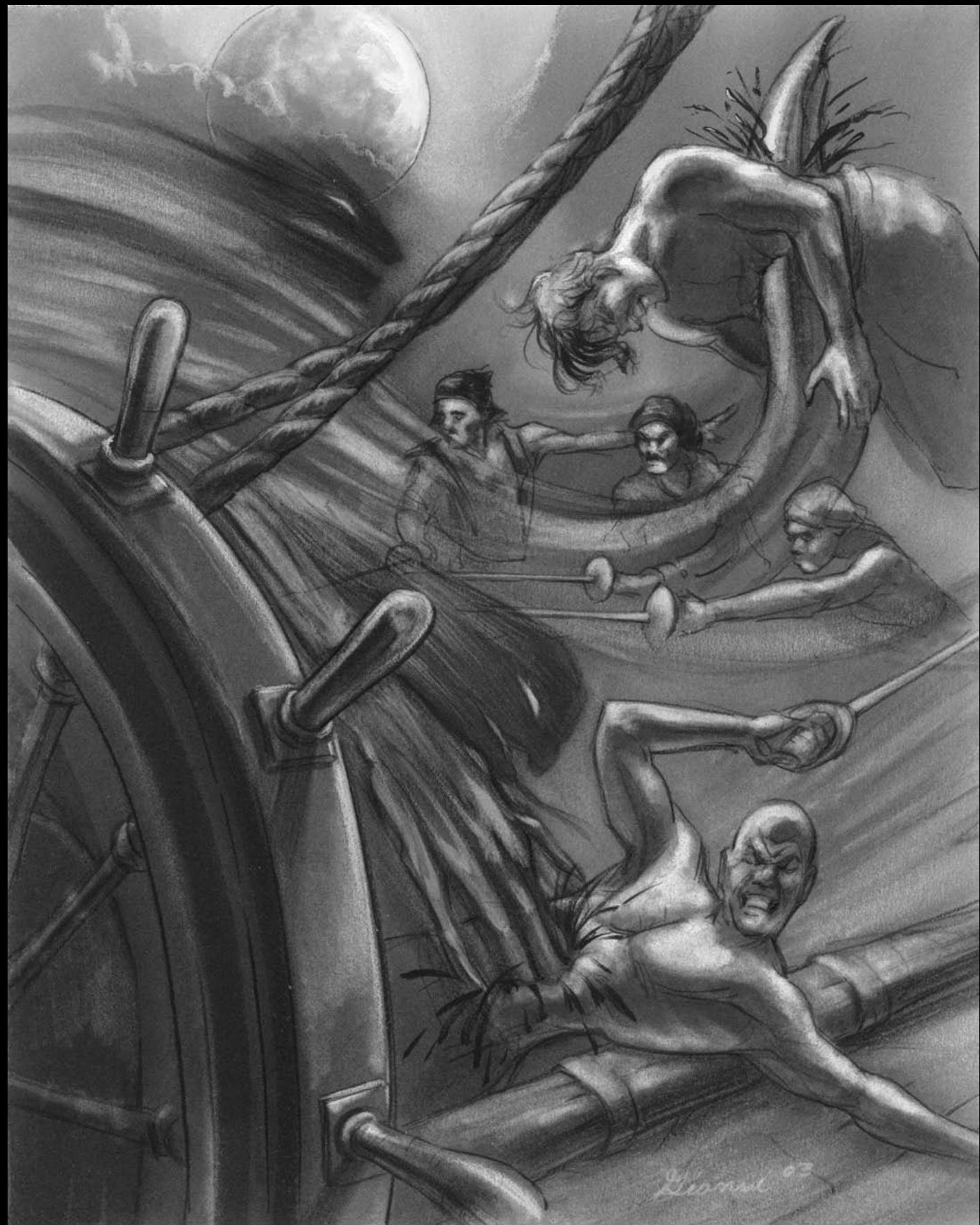
**Quicklime** — A form of calcium oxide used as a chemical weapon.

**Scutage** — “Shield money;” the practice of wealthy landowners giving their lords money instead of serving time on the battlefield. The money is then typically used to hire professional soldiers.

**Towers** — Structures usually of stone but also of wood, designed as vantage points, support for walls, and shelters.

**Trebuchet** — A counterweight siege engine.





Giovanni 03

# CHAPTER ONE: DUTY AND STEEL

"We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;  
For he today that sheds his blood with me  
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,  
This day shall gentle his condition;  
And gentlemen in England now a-bed  
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,  
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks  
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day."

— William Shakespeare, *Henry V*

Residents of the Dark Medieval are unlikely to be familiar with the opening lines of Sun Tzu's *The Art of War*, which states, "The art of war is of vital importance to the State. It is a matter of life and death, a road either to safety or to ruin." They would empathize with its meaning, however. War and its execution are central to the social order, the entire concept of feudalism and fealty built around the bonds of military service. The formation and employment of castle guards, militia, armies and other armed forces are thus a key part of the lives of many, particularly the noble classes. While the rule of law and morality holds sway in most areas, the principal of "might makes right" is never far from anyone who holds (or would seek to hold) power. Even those who are not directly involved in the prosecution of wars will likely find themselves involved to some degree, either as part of the feudal structure (where applicable), supporting or financing the combatants, or else victims of war.

# A Martial Society

Much of the way battles and wars are fought in the Dark Medieval is tied to the social structures and mindset of the practitioners. In much of Europe, these are synonymous with the concepts of feudalism and chivalry, though different forces act on the fringes of “civilized” society, such as Outremer.

## Feudal Society

Central to much — but by no means all — of the power structure in Europe is the principle of feudalism. In its most basic form, feudalism is a series of interlocking relationships and duties that bind a landholder to his superiors. Usually, the land belongs to the overlord (liege) but is parceled out among his subordinates (vassals) in exchange for particular services and loyalty. In general, this service is military in nature, with the landholder bound to provide his master with a number of troops for a specific period of the year, depending on the size and nature of the land grant (commonly known as a fief). Feudalism is hierarchical, and in many cases one landholder’s overlord is a vassal of another higher lord, forming a pyramid of power at the pinnacle of which sits the monarch. The feudal relationship works both ways, too; in addition to granting his vassals land, the overlord is responsible for protecting the lands and rights of his subordinates.

Feudalism is not, however, static. It evolved over the centuries to reflect local conditions, and while the basic structures of feudalism exist across much of the Dark Medieval local variations are becoming increasingly pronounced. In northern France and England, for example, land grants are the principal means of securing vassalage and its attendant military service, while in the south of France, where many knights reside in towns, payment for service is more common. In many areas, lords buy themselves out of their military service obligations, providing the monarch with money (in England known as “scutage” — shield money) that in turn paid for the hiring of mercenary troops. This is particularly appropriate in the Angevin domains, obviating the need to take feudal troops from the relative security of the British Isles onto the continent where most of the Angevin battles took place.

Cainites have found great uses for chivalry — its rigid organization reflects their own power structures — leading to the establishment of feudal domains that span much of Europe. The Baronies of Avalon in the British Isles, the Courts of Love in France, the Sea of

Shadows in Iberia, Italy and Greece, the Fiefs of the Black Cross in Germany, and the Voivodate in Eastern Europe are each headed by a Cainite monarch. Though these are not nations in the same sense as the mortal institutions, they do place considerable power in the hands of a relatively small number of leaders. More details on the Cainite nobility of Europe can be found in *Dark Ages: Europe*.

## Chivalry

The concept of chivalry is inextricably linked with the image of the medieval knight — the idea that the actions of a Christian warrior are bound by a particular code of mortality and ethics. In reality, no individual code exists but rather a series of overlapping ideals. For example, while the ideals for a noble and a knight have much in common — both stress military skill and behavior — that of the knight revolves almost entirely around warfare while that of a noble stresses learning and justice. Eventually a merging of these ideals occurred as those of a Christian knight, and in the 13th century the soldier-priest Ramón Lull of Majorca codifies these in his *Libre del Ordre de Cauayleria* (“The Book of the Order of Chivalry”). The core attributes are faith, courtesy, honesty, purity, loyalty, prowess and the absence of pride. In many regards, this recognizes the Christian virtues in the military context, at least for the chivalrous knight who fights only when he has to (as opposed to professional soldiers who are considered to be both inferior and damned).

In many regards, the ideals are impossible to adhere to fully on the battlefield (although the effort is made) — abstinence from killing, good treatment of prisoners — but other aspects became central to martial orders, notably loyalty to comrades, respect for fellow knights and an unwillingness to break oaths (no matter how inconvenient or unjust). Other aspects, such as mercy toward the weak, are considered virtues but are rarely practiced save when it suits the knight. The absence of pride is likewise rarely practical. Indeed, many warriors desire glory and the establishment of their reputation, which crystallizes in the form of prowess. The knight able to demonstrate both prowess and absence of pride is a rare warrior.

Even where a knight does not follow the chivalric ideal, the concepts of good and bad war prevail. Tolerance and restraint typify “good war” while cruelty and barbarism epitomize “bad war.” Outrages such as occurred at Jerusalem or Béziers were exceptions to the rule, and for the most part civilians are spared

outright bloodshed, albeit not the hardships of war (see Foraging on p.40 XX). As the practice of ransom (see Chapter Three) shows, noble troops can expect to be treated well by their peers in enemy forces when not in combat, but nonnoble troops frequently suffer abuse at the hands of their “superiors.” Likewise, the chivalric ideals are only practical where all those involved adhered to them (principally France and England). This is often true where the combatants are knights, but as infantry grows in importance, the role of chivalry declines.

In areas where Christianity doesn’t hold sway, the tenets of chivalry rarely apply, though elements do appear, particularly as they relate to the military arts. For example, the Saracens of Outremer do respect martial learning that they codify in the form of the *furusiya* that also encompasses social behavior. Likewise, Islamic belief encourages hospitality. Islamic warriors have no compunction, however, about using methods that a chivalric European would find offensive, such as assassination; success is what matters, not how that success is achieved.

Even in the heart of Western Christendom, the tenets of chivalry aren’t always accepted. While the Order of the Poor Knights of the Passion of the Cross of Acre solidly adhere to the tenets of chivalry (except, of course, where the Adversary is concerned), the Red Order and the Oculi Dei are less particular about the methods used and more interested in the end results of their actions. Similarly, Garou such as the Warders, Fianna, Fenrir and Silver Fangs, while not always adhering to the tenets of chivalry — and in fact rarely Christian — do follow their own codes of honor that approximate the chivalric ideal. Conversely, the Black Furies, Bone Gnawers and Red Talons rarely do so, foregoing the niceties of “civilization” in favor of baser instincts.

The adoption of chivalry by magi likewise varies depending on the prevailing culture. As Muslims, the Batini do not adhere to the tenets of chivalry though they may follow the *furusiya* code. Members of the Messianic Voices, however, are more likely to follow the chivalric ideal — indeed, a number are members of the martial orders — and the Hermetics’ belief in self-discipline leads a number of their members to follow the chivalric ideal to some extent. Pagan groups — the Old Faith, Spirit-Talkers and Valdaermen — follow the lead of their prevailing cultures in rejecting the precepts of chivalry.

Among Cainites, the concepts of chivalry have taken strongest root among the High Clans, notably the Toreador, Ventrue and Lasombra, though its

acceptance is far from universal and members of the Low Clans may also follow its tenets. Conversely, members of other clans, most often the Tzimisce, may accept the ideals of knighthood and martial service without accepting chivalry per se. Indeed, while some Cainites are strong believers in the concept of chivalry and its practitioners — knights embody both martial and political power — others fear chivalry for much the same reason. Some Cainites empathize strongly with the struggle of knights to hold true to their ideals and liken it to their own struggle against their vampiric nature. It is little surprise, therefore, that a number of Cainites are members of chivalric orders, most notably the Order of Bitter Ashes and the Order of Rodrigo. Chapter One of **The Ashen Knight** provides more detail on chivalry and its application and variations in the Dark Medieval.

## The Causes of War

A wide range of reasons exist to explain why armies launch into enemy territories and battles take place. Some are crude and simplistic, easily understood and classified. Most, however, are more complex, involving multiple causes and factors, frequently interlinked. Indeed, many overt reasons for conflict may conceal less public but more accurate rationales. Such hidden motives may be known only to a few or an open secret among those involved. The most notable rationales are religion, politics, resources and culture, but each encompasses a legion of lesser causes and rationales and in many cases is a confused mélange of reasons.

## Wars of Religion

Religion is perhaps the most stirring cause of war in the Dark Medieval and is the rationale for numerous large-scale campaigns. Of these, the wars in the Levant known collectively as the Crusades are most far-reaching, drawing troops from across Europe and seeking to bind them into a common force to advance the cause of Christianity.

Religion can also restrain hostilities, via either the Truce of God, a general suspension of hostilities for a short period, or the Peace of God, a more permanent set of restrictions on warfare, albeit restricted to set times, locales (churches, monasteries, cemeteries) and persons (clerics, virgins, pilgrims, crusaders). For example, in Christian lands, battles are rarely fought on Sundays, a day protected by the Peace of God, and other holy periods such as Advent and Lent are likewise considered sacrosanct. The penalty

for breaking the Peace of God or the Truce of God is excommunication or exile. Where opposing religions clash — such as in Outremer or the Baltic — such matters gain additional significance; a Christian force may not wish to fight on a Sunday but its opponents may have no such compunction and so the Christian force must keep up its guard or else be caught unprepared. In a classic example of what not to do, a number of Livonian knights died in Lithuania battling forces under the Spirit-Talker Mindaugan after the knights set up camp in Zemaitija but failed to post guards, trusting to the Peace of God. Mindaugan, understanding only that the invaders had foolishly failed to post guards, took this as a sign that the spirits were with him and pressed the attack. The knights, whether because of spiritual intervention or their own stupidity, were slain almost to a man.

## The Crusades

In 1095 at the Council of Clermont, Pope Urban II responded to calls by the Byzantines for aid against the encroaching Muslims and called for a crusade to liberate the Holy Land and restore the ease of passage for pilgrims bound to Jerusalem. While war against the infidel was the most obvious of the reasons for the First Crusade, Pope Urban also hoped it would help unify the eastern (Orthodox) and western (Catholic)

branches of the Christian faith (and, of course, gaining personal power was most certainly a goal for Urban as well).

The Crusade established a series of European lordships — the Crusader States — that were the focus of struggles between Christians and Muslims for the next few centuries. The half-hearted Second Crusade failed to improve the Crusader position, while the Muslim success at Hattin prompted the Third Crusade that, while a military success, achieved its goal — Christian access to Jerusalem — only by means of politics and negotiation. These conflicts also operated on a wider level than European Christians vs. the Muslim inhabitants of the region. Other forces accompanied the Crusades — European Cainites clashed with the native Ashirra while Hermetic and Messianic magi sought to learn the mysteries of the Levant, bringing them into conflict with the local Ahl-i-Batin. Even the Garou, nominally respectful of territorial rights, found themselves thrust into conflict with their cousins in Outremer. Though brought about by religion, these conflicts were (and still are in most cases) less concerned with religion than with culture and politics and are thus discussed in those sections below. The notable exceptions are the European Cainite vs. Ashirra and Messianic vs. Batini clashes, both of which are centered on religion even though they encompass other concerns. In both cases, the competing



factions not only disdain the others but also regard them as blasphemous perversions of the truth. As such, neither faction gives the other any quarter and the result is a bloody and highly charged environment.

Three more crusades followed in 1204, 1225 and 1227, but all proved disastrous. The Venetians supported the Fourth Crusade in 1204 that ended with

the sack of Constantinople and the fall of the Byzantine Empire while simultaneously ending much of the Crusader fervor in Europe — the shattered lands of Byzantium were more attractive to those seeking power than the harsh lands of Outremer. It also heralded the onset of the Cainite War of Princes, the destruction of the Patriarch of Constantinople,

## JUST WAR AND THE CRUSADER MENTALITY

Though Christianity espouses peaceful coexistence, the Church tolerates — and indeed has encouraged on a number of occasions — the taking up of arms and resolution of matters by force. Saint Augustine's work *On the City of God* proposed the doctrine that developed into "Just War," later added to by Alexander of Hales. Such conflicts are considered just if they are intended to right a wrong (real or perceived). Indeed, Augustine stated *justa bella ulciscuntur injuries* — "Just wars avenge injuries."

Such Just Wars have a series of governing principals codified in the 13th century by Thomas Aquinas in his *De Bello*, part of his *Summa Theologica*. *Legitimate Authority* grants only the rulers of the state the right to declare war. Others below the rank of sovereign do not have this right, as they may appeal to higher authorities in the form of courts or their liege-lords. *Just Cause* allows a nation to wage war on another if the target has caused some injury to the aggressor (or its allies). *Right Intentions* require the armies involved to keep the objectives of peace and "just cause" in mind. They may do so to right wrongs inflicted on them but should not fight simply for revenge or plunder. *Last Resort* implies that all nonviolent means for resolution should have been exhausted before the parties resort to war. *Probability of Success* requires that no matter how just, a war should be fought only if a reasonable prospect of victory exists. The later *Proportionality* (added by Aquinas) tenets say that the prospects of good in the war must outweigh the evil (damage, etc.) caused by the conflict.

Of course, many conflicts do not fulfill all of these criteria (or even the initial five), though frequently the combatants engineer or manufacture appropriate justifications, particularly to justify their action as "righting a wrong." Where this is not the case, the combatants (though usually just the aggressor) risked censure by the Church. For

example, Pope Honorius III threatened supporters of Prince Louis of France with excommunication if they continued their "unjust" war against Henry III.

The Benedictine Gratian, in establishing canon law as a distinct theological discipline in the 12th century, distinguished between Just War (in defense of the state) and Holy War (in defense of the Church), though both are bound up in the tenets of faith. The latter is central to the establishment of the "Crusader Mentality" — the idea of a war of aggression in defense of the Church and its holy places. Indeed, participating in such wars, the Crusades as they became known, was not only justified in the sight of god but was a religious imperative. "Taking the Cross" — the crusaders' vows, signified by a cross sewn onto their garments — is relatively common. Almost anyone can do this — rich or poor, male or female — though the majority of active crusaders are male soldiers. Other cross-takers demonstrated their support of the cause by providing money (often impoverishing themselves and their families while filling the coffers of the Church) or aiding the active crusaders, and received favors from the Church comparable to those granted an active crusader (usually papal protection of their lands and property, as well as eternal salvation for their souls).

An individual's reasons for taking the Cross can vary considerably. Many — mortal, undead or otherwise — do so for religious reasons, their fervor directed into the "holy war," but some do so in support of others (particularly a low-status individual in support of his master), to advance their own positions or as part of a penance. Some are buoyed by dreams of self-aggrandizement or quests for personal profit, though the cost of the endeavor — and the risks involved — meant that such individuals were, in the early crusades at least, a distinct minority. Europe's mages — the Hermetics and Messianics in particular — use the crusades to advance their own causes, concealing themselves among the crusaders and their entourage in an effort to expand their knowledge of the world and to divine the secrets of Outremer.

Michael, being regarded as the first overt move in the struggle between Europe's most powerful Cainites.

## The Albigensian Crusade

The dualist heresy known as Catharism gained a solid foothold in southern France. Concerned with the influence its followers had on affairs in the region and its challenge to the church, Pope Innocent III declared it a heresy to be eliminated. He called on the King of France, Philippe II, to take action against the southern nobles who supported (or at least tolerated) the heresy. The king refused. Efforts to suppress the heresy turned into a crusade in 1208 after the assassination of papal legate Pierre de Castelnau at Saint-Gilles. In response, the Pontiff proclaimed a crusade against the heretics of the Midi, declaring their lands void and offering indulgences to any who would take the cross against them. Again, King Philippe refused to become involved but did authorize his vassals to aid the Church's cause. Others joined the Crusade in search of lands and wealth.

The Albigensian Crusade also incorporated struggles between the Provencal Cainites and those of the Courts of Love in Paris. Numerous Cainites joined the crusade, ostensibly to protect their faith — the Cainite Heresy is deeply rooted in the lands around Toulouse — but also to remove a threat to their hegemony and to expand their own holdings. The trigger for this was accusations leveled at Escarlamonde the Black of Toulouse who, it was claimed, conspired with Aragonese Lasombra and who was thus targeted by Ventre and Toreador forces under cover of the crusade against the Cathar Heresy. While operating under the cover of the mortal crusade, the battle between Cainites took its own tortuous path, targeting a number of vampiric holdings in the region or manipulating mortal forces to do so. Such brutality quickly became a matter of policy among the monstrous members of the crusade; seeking to exploit the chaos to their own advantage, numerous Ventre and their retainers targeted areas frequented by Hermetic mages (often under the counsel of Tremere advisors).

The mortal Crusaders seized several towns, the most notable of which was Béziers, which could have withstood the siege for some time were it not for a group of residents seeking to escape and who in doing so allowed the Crusaders entry. Many inhabitants were slain — up to twenty thousand according to some accounts — including many who had taken refuge in the Church of the Magdalene. The threat of further butchery led to the quick surrender of Carcassonne, seat of Raymond-Roger Trencavel, who died in cap-

tivity three months later, some say of dysentery, others say assassinated by the crusaders. A succession of battles and sieges followed, culminating in the Battle of Muret in 1213 when, despite outnumbering the Crusaders, the local lords were defeated.

In secret, however, the crusade took a number of unexpected and dangerous twists. The Church learned of the Cainite Heresy (although it did not make the connection between Cainites and vampires) and its agents pursued these vile blasphemers with even more fervor than they did the Cathars. Though the Cainite Heresy outlasted Catharism in Languedoc, its discovery was central to the chain of events that led to the formation of the shadow Inquisition. Though that order did not formally come into existence until the first Council of Faith in 1223, various elements were involved in this first phase of the crusade against "the servants of Satan."

In mortal ken, the conflict rumbled on until 1224 when, after the Pope invited them to negotiate, the lords of Languedoc swore to fight heresy and respect the king's authority. This endeavor failed and triggered a crusade by King Louis VIII of France, culminating with the Treaty of Paris in 1229 that included the military surrender of the pro-Cathar lords. Officially, the Council of Toulouse later that year ended the Crusade, but in truth the conflict against the Cathars merely entered a new phase while the civil war among magi and Cainites continued unabated.

More details of the Albigensian Crusade and its impact on the Cainites of Languedoc can be found in Chapter Two of *Dark Ages: Europe*.

## The Reconquista

The rapid expansion of the Islamic world led them to conquer almost all of the Iberian peninsula by the early eighth century — in fact the Muslim forces reached as far as Poitou, where they were repulsed by Charles Martel in 732. The native forces began the reconquest of Iberia almost immediately but made little ground against the unified enemy. Only when the Islamic hegemony collapsed into a collection of petty states in the 11th century did they begin to make progress. The Crusader mentality that swept Europe likewise surfaced in Iberia, but rather than being directed toward the Holy Land, it was channeled into the liberation of "their" lands from Islamic domination. The most notable of the lords of the early Reconquista was Rodrigo Diaz de Vivar, better known as El Cid (from the Islamic *sayyid* or "lord"), who despite his refusal of the Embrace remained a major

icon for the region's Lasombra Cainites. Unusually, though he sought to expand Christian holdings, El Cid worked with the Muslim ruler of Saragossa and occasionally fought against other Christians, demonstrating the complex interactions of politics and religion. This complexity also applies to the supernatural conflicts that mark the Iberian Peninsula. Batini and Hermetic mages can often be found in discussion, though relations between Messianics and the Islamic magi are much more volatile.

Several military orders emerged as a result of — or to support — a succession of Iberian crusades, most notably the Knights of Santiago, who protected the pilgrimage routes across northern Iberia to Santiago de Compostela. Cainites, seeking to eject the Ashirra from Iberia, founded their own military orders, some intertwined with mortal institutions, others standing alone. Their clashes with the Islamic vampires are perhaps more clear-cut than the mortal wars of reconquest; while the mortals entertain the ideas of incorporating the lands and peoples of their enemy, the Cainites seek their annihilation or ejection. A number of Iberia's vampires (particularly in Portugal) are embroiled in the Cainite Heresy that often works at cross-purposes with Clan Lasombra's *Amici Noctis*, promoting tensions within the Christian Cainites of Iberia.

By the 1230s, much of Iberia has been returned to native control and, with the exception of expansion by Aragon into the Balearic Islands, the "liberation" of Iberia comes to a virtual standstill for several decades, the Moorish Kingdom of Granada recognizing the overlordship of Castile and working in harmony with its northern neighbors.

## Jihad

The Islamic concept of "jihad" is much misunderstood, often taken to mean the conquest and conversion of lands by force of arms. Jihad is a more complex matter, involving both spiritual struggles within oneself and efforts to spread the Islamic faith. Islam encourages peaceful conversion of others — in fact, the Qur'an prohibits conversions by force — particularly other "peoples of the book," who are allowed to continue their faith after payment of a tax. Provision is made for the waging of holy war against unbelievers and enemies of the faith, and those who fall in jihad are considered martyrs, their sins are forgiven, and they are immediately allowed into paradise. The Qur'an also prohibits the waging of wars for the sake of acquiring wealth and power, but, as in the Christian world, such precepts are often overlooked or deliberately undermined by unscrupulous rulers.

## The Baltic

The Teutonic Knights' conquests in the Baltic — Prussia from 1233 to 1283 and later expanding to Poland and Lithuania — as well as Sweden and Novgorod's expansion into Finland brings both Catholic and Orthodox Christianity into conflict with older pagan religions and their supernatural supporters. The factions of Christianity also battle each other; Swedish forces under Birger Magnusson face off against their Orthodox Novgorod rivals at the Neva River in 1240, leading to the victorious Russian commander being dubbed Alexander "Nevsky," who goes on to defeat the Teutonic Knights on the ice of Lake Peipus in 1242. This loosely organized conflict lasts decades, disrupted briefly by the Mongol invasion, though Russian Princes such as Nevsky cooperate with their new overlords to maintain Christianity and rebuild the strength of the Russian principalities.

Various factions of supernatural beings ally themselves with the forces seeking dominance over the region, notably Cainites who are untroubled by the harsh conditions and revel in the long dark winters, and various groups of werewolf and Kinfolk. The greatest conflict, however, is between disparate groups of mages as well as forces of the Church. The main combatants are the Messianic Voices and the Spirit-Talkers, the former in an unknowing alliance with the shadow Inquisition's Red Order against the pagan magi. Both Christian groups eye each other warily, neither trusting the other but reliant on them to split the attention of the entrenched Spirit-Talkers and their allies. Here, the Messianics have the upper hand, caring little — unlike the Red Order — about the activities of werewolves and vampires in the region. To the shadow Inquisition, the lands of the Baltic are truly the devil's playgrounds.

## The Chivalric Orders

One offshoot of the Crusades to Outremer, and in both Iberian and Eastern Europe, are the Chivalric Orders. Most fall under the purview of the Church, their organization and actions subject to the approval of the Pope, though they usually operate independently. Some, however, originated outside the Church and were either approved post-facto or remain independent. A few wield immense power, and while not strong enough to be regarded as "sovereign" (i.e., nations in their own right), several do have enough influence to hold themselves above the petty concerns of countries.

Members of the orders are bound to their fellows by religious and personal vows and their activities regulated by rules and strictures. In some — those regarded as military-monastic orders such as the Templars — the members serve as both combatants and priests. Other orders, like the Knights of Saint John, differentiate between fighting men and clerics, while wholly hospitaler orders such as the Order of Saint Lazarus care for others but have no fighting men.

Chapter Three of **The Ashen Knight** details several of the orders listed below (and others), while Chapter Four of that book details the Cainite Order of Bitter Ashes. **Iberia by Night** contains details on the Knights of Santiago and the Lions of Rodrigo. **Under a Black Cross** details the Teutonic Knights and the Order of the Black Cross. The Poor Knights of the Passion of the Cross of Acre are detailed in **Dark Ages: Inquisitor**.

- **Poor Knights of Christ and of the Temple of Solomon (Templars):** Military-monastic order, founded in Outremer circa 1119. Their symbol is a red cross on a white background. The current Grand Master is Peter de Montaigu. The order incorporates a small Messianic chantry, some of the Templars' most prominent figures numbering among these knight-magi. It is also a major recruiting ground for the Inquisition's Poor Knights of the Passion of the Cross of Acre. Rumors circulate that some members of the order have been lured into demonic pacts.

- **Knights of Saint John of Jerusalem (Hospitalers):** Military-hospitaler order, founded in Outremer in 1080. Their symbol is a white cross worn on a black robe. In 1230, the Grand Master of the order is Bertrand de Thessy.

- **Order of Saint Lazarus:** Hospitaler order, founded in Outremer in 1100 and responsible for the care of lepers.

- **Order of the Knights of the Hospital of St. Mary of the Teutons in Jerusalem (Teutonic Knights):** Military-hospitaler order founded in Outremer in 1190 but presently crusading in Prussia. The current Grand Master of the order is Hermann von Salza. The ghoul and Cainite Order of the Black Cross (see below) exists within the Teutonic Knights.

- **Order of Avis:** Military order, founded in Portugal in 1143.

- **Knights Alcántara:** Military order, founded in León in 1156.

- **Knights Calatrava:** Military order, founded in Castille in 1158, with strong ties to the Cistercian monks.

- **Order of the Sword:** Founded on Cyprus in 1192 by Guy of Lusignan.

- **Military Order of Saint James of the Sword (Knights of Santiago):** Military-hospitaler order, founded in Castile in 1164. It is the principal recruiting ground for the Poor Knights of the Passion of the Cross of Acre in Iberia.

- **Order of Our Lady of Mercy (Mercedarians):** Military-hospitaler (though regarded by many as simply a hospitaler) order, founded in Barcelona in 1218.

- **Knights of Saint Thomas of Acre:** Military-hospitaler order, founded circa 1190, allegedly by Richard the Lionhearted.

- **Knights of Sant-Jordi d'Alfama:** Founded in Aragon in 1201, this order helps administer Majorca after its capture by Aragon. Clan Lasombra has a substantial foothold within the order, exerting much of its influence through high-ranking ghouls.

- **Livonian Brothers of the Sword (The Sword Brethren):** Founded privately in Bremen in 1197 but later established as a military order in 1202. It merges with the Teutonic Order in 1237. The leader is Grand Master Volkwin von Winterstatten. Unknown to the Sword Brethren, many of their members originating in Oldenburg are werewolf Kinfolk and a small pack of Fenrir operates within the order.

- **The Poor Knights of the Passion of the Cross of Acre:** A military-monastic order of the shadow Inquisition, drawing its membership from other orders, notably the Templars, Hospitalers, Teutonic Knights and Knights of Santiago.

- **Order of Bitter Ashes:** A Cainite military order, operating across Europe but based at the Castle in the Lake in Scotland. It epitomizes the concepts of chivalry as they apply to vampires and also aids nonwarrior Cainites in their search for redemption. The order suffered grievous losses in the Albigensian Crusades, its Provencal holdings targeted by both mortal and Cainite crusaders.

- **The Lions of Rodrigo:** A Cainite military order in Iberia, dedicated to the Shadow Reconquista to liberate Iberia from the Muslim Ashirra. They are, however, viewed with suspicion by their Christian fellows, targeting as they do any Cainites who are not wholly committed to the Shadow Reconquista.

- **Order of the Black Cross:** A military order within the Teutonic Knights in which members are initiated into an ever-deepening series of mysteries, first becoming ghouls blood-bound to the Cainites within the order and then — in a few instances —

granted the Embrace. Lucretia von Hartz, a vassal of Lord Jürgen, leads the Order of the Black Cross.

## Political Wars

Whether it is a dispute over land or a succession, or in response to some perceived injury, armies take the field. Often this is in violation of the concepts of Just War, though many lords seek to establish at least some pretext for their actions. Disputes over rights — those of a vassal with respect to his liege and vice versa — are a common source of conflict. A land-holder who feels his rights are being damaged or ignored by his overlord may feel his only way to seek redress is by fighting, though a very fine line exists between defending one's rights and committing a treasonous act. A lord may likewise view force of arms as the only way of impressing his will on a rebellious vassal and is within his rights to retake land from a subordinate who has abrogated his oaths of allegiance. Of course, precisely when rights are being damaged and by whom is a matter of interpretation, and it is probable that both sides in a conflict view themselves as right. In most cases, the lines of responsibility are clear — a lord may be the vassal of one lord, from whom he holds lands or receives income, and may in turn be the overlord of lesser nobles, nonetheless maintaining a clear line of loyalty and duty. Where such matters become problematic is when a lord is simultaneously an equal and a vassal of another lord. For example, the Angevin Kings are vassals of the King of France for most of their continental holdings but are themselves the overlords of England and its possessions.

This applies as much to the supernatural forces of the Dark Medieval as it does the mortal institutions. A vampiric vassal may fall afoul of his overlord or resent her present relationship. The frictions between Mithras and a number of his subordinates in the Court of Avalon are a case in point, as are those in the Courts of Love, notably in Provence and concealed by the Albigensian Crusade.

Internal political conflicts may take the form of civil war, pitting one faction against another. This can result from the independence vs. fealty situation outlined above but is usually more complex in nature. For example, the troubles that dogged the latter part of John Lackland's reign came about because of political disputes over rights and responsibilities, as well as the king's perceived weakness after being excommunicated. This mortal conflict coincided with efforts by ambitious Cainites to unseat Prince Mithras, leading to war by both night and day. The mortal situation became even more complicated when the barons

called upon the King of France for aid — he sent his son, Louis, who sought to take the throne. The French Cainites who supported Louis and who sought to challenge Mithras' rule over Avalon did not find the British Cainites disorganized like their mortal associates. Instead, they encountered a unified and well organized force, both militarily and politically. Unlike the Magna Carta, the Rose Treaty that defined Cainite authority quickly proved effective, ending (for the moment) action against Mithras.

Succession in its own right can be the trigger for political conflict. Disputes can erupt over who should succeed (such as the English "Anarchy" that resulted from Stephen and Matilda's disputes in the mid-12th century) or a successor seeking to take "his" authority before the demise of his predecessor (as with Henry the Young King and Richard the Lionhearted vs. their father, Henry II, though the two sons did not act together). Though the blood oath usually counters this type of challenge of a sire by his childer, such situations can arise among the Cainites as a whole. Indeed, the diablerie of Saulot by the Tremere can be seen as the ultimate challenge to the established line of succession, while on a smaller scale individual Cainites may seek to unseat and diablerize their elders. Matters of succession likewise affect the Garou, but whereas in Cainite or mortal society such battles are damaging, the Garou believe that they serve to keep a pack or sept strong. Deposing a weak leader is almost a societal imperative among the werewolves, though the Litany allows such challenges only when no immediate threat to the pack exists, a fact canny alphas use to minimize challenges to their authority.

## Wars of Resources

The quest for wealth and land, though officially dismissed by the concept of Just War, is the major factor in many conflicts in the Dark Medieval. In a number of cases, such wars are inextricably linked with politics (such as the conflicts between the Angevin and Capetian dynasties in England and France) or religion (in the form of the Crusades and Reconquista). The Garou and Cainites are often thrown into conflict over such matters, notably in Ireland, Scandinavia and Russia, where the vampires have expanded into lands previously claimed exclusively by the werewolves. Likewise, werewolves and mages clash over control of caerns, and occasionally even the fae appear to defend the glens they have traditionally held.

In the East, "Tartar" raiders plundered numerous towns along the Black Sea coast, raiding both the

Crimea and the Dneiper Valley before withdrawing. The people of the region live in fear that these attackers will return, little realizing that this “invasion” is little more than a scouting force. The Mongol Horde descended on Russia in 1223, conquering Kiev before driving into Eastern Europe. The invaders penetrate as far as Liegnitz (where a great battle is fought in April of 1241) before withdrawing to Russia and establishing the Golden Horde. The Cainites known as Anda are entwined with this invading society and play a significant role in the nightly battles in Russia and Eastern Europe. Though lacking the numerical advantage of their mortal comrades, the Anda are more than a match for the Cainite princes of the Russian principalities, many of whom will fall before the invaders. More detail on the Anda and their impact on Russia and Eastern Europe can be found in *Wind from the East*.

## Wars of Culture

“Wars of Culture” take place when radically different societies come into contact with each other and battle for supremacy. For the most part, these overlap with wars of religion, politics and resources, but rather than just a single element of society being in conflict, such wars see an attempt by one culture to replace the incumbent institutions with its own. In Iberia, Islamic institutions and attitudes are being replaced wholesale, albeit slowly, with those of the Christian lands, while in Outremer the effects are less pronounced. Indeed, in the “Christian” Crusader kingdoms, most of the subjects are Jewish or Muslim and the Christian lords frequently make deals with their neighbors. Indeed, the Christian nobility often get on well with their Muslim neighbors and subjects—which is more than can be said of the Ashirra and the “Frankish” Cainites who wage almost constant war against each other, neither willing to give up dominion of the nights. In stark contrast, the Ahl-i-Batin are somewhat less wedded to their dominance of the Levant. They have shown themselves willing to tolerate some outside traditions, notably the Hermetics, while remaining at odds with others such as the Messianic Voices, a result of the Christian mages’ religious and cultural biases.

Even in the heart of Christendom, clashes of religion and culture take place as mortal and supernatural institutions seek to stamp out the pre-existing and replace them with homogenous Christian practices. The rich Provencal culture fell before the depredations of the Albigensian Crusade, and Garou of all tribes and Old Faith are the main targets of supernatural attention,

joined in Scandinavia by the Valdaermen, their practices and beliefs tied in with a lifestyle that predates Christendom. Such groups struggle to maintain their identities in the face of pressure from Christianity in the form of the Messianic Voices, the shadow Inquisition and Cainites lurking in the military orders (notably the Teutonic Knights).

## The Waging of War on Land

Above all, one form of soldier dominates the warfare in the Dark Medieval: the mounted knight. Heavily armed and armored, commonly trained in the arts of war from a young age, these heavy troops can run roughshod over lesser forces. They comprise, however, only a small part of the available military and are only common in Western Europe and Outremer, together with those areas of Eastern Europe such as Hungary and Poland that have adopted Western techniques of warfare.

Despite the importance of knights, however, the infantry of the 13th century plays a significant role in warfare, particularly in defensive campaigns and sieges. Light infantry are the mainstay, serving as foragers and skirmish troops, while heavy infantry (frequently mercenaries) provide a solid defense. The elite of the infantry are missile troops.

## Strategies of War

The commander of an army has numerous things to consider when planning a campaign, many forced upon him by the geography and available resources. Feudal troops are usually available for only a specific period of time, around 40 days, after which they are free to go home. Campaigns have to work within these time limits, and while some feudal troops might extend their period of service at the request of the commander, this is unlikely. Having a campaign run over the allotted time can make for immense difficulties; the withdrawal of Simon de Montfort’s feudal levies after the seizure of Carcassonne in 1209 made it difficult for him to pacify his new lands—he was left with only 30 knights.

Such troops gather at a prearranged muster point, usually a castle or town, though in doing so they give enemy spies the opportunity to divine their intentions—in practical terms, the number of objectives that can be reached from a specific muster point are limited. For example, in the clash between the Shadow

Lords of the Black Moon Sept and their longtime rivals, the Fenrir of the Sept of Three-Blood Rock, the Shadow Lords gained a decisive advantage by marshaling their forces as if to strike at a nearby Benedictine abbey but instead attacked across the River Elbe, taking the Fenrir by surprise.

The assembling of troops — and thus the times when campaigns can take place — is limited by the seasons. Spring and autumn are the main farming periods and keeping men from the fields would invite famine and starvation. Likewise, the winter weather in northern and central Europe is too harsh to allow campaigning, though the longer nights make this the favored time of year for Cainites to settle their disputes in open conflict. Even here, however, the vampires must be wary of undermining the physical and economic well being of any mortal pawns they use in such encounters. Consequently, summer is the main season for campaigns and battles, though conflicts do take place at other times of year if the conditions are appropriate and the troops available. Alexander Nevsky's battle against the Teutonic Knights takes place in the winter of 1242 (though the Cainite Order of the Black Cross, entwined with the Teutons and which favors conflict in such conditions, likely influences the timing).

## Objectives and Methods

Medieval conflicts are rarely aimed at the enemy's fighting force with a view to breaking his power. Rather, they are most often aimed at denuding an opponent's resources, be they towns, castles or farmlands for mortals. When the supernatural denizens of the Dark Medieval become involved, goals often include more rarefied targets such as caerns, crays and even the mortal inhabitants of an area. Open-field clashes between massed armies (as opposed to skirmishes between small forces or sieges) are comparatively rare. Instead, each side jockeys for position, attempting to outwit and outmaneuver the other, accomplishing — or denying — the objectives without a fully fledged battle taking place. Here, the ability to perceive an opponent's actions or intentions, or to befuddle his senses, gives the supernatural denizens of the Dark Medieval a distinct advantage. For example, a Batini's Al-Layl or a Spirit-Talker's Trickster Pillars can allow them to disguise their actions, likewise the Cainite powers of Obtenebration and Obscure. A Ravnos' Chimerstry can also mislead foes via illusion, while an adherent of the Old Faith can use the Winter Pillar to demoralize his foes. Supernatural powers can also counter such efforts —

a Cainite's Auspex, a Valdaerman's Galdrar or the Red Order's *Sophia Patris* path allow them to see through illusions, while any inquisitor's Conviction allows him to throw off the effects of fear, be they of natural or supernatural origin.

Clashes between skirmishers typify such actions, both forces deploying scouts and irregular forces to locate and pin their opponents and to unravel the opponents' plans. Such units' emphasis on irregular operations makes them ideal bases for supernatural forces to operate from, as these beings may employ their powers with less risk of drawing undue attention. In addition to scouting enemy positions, these screening forces may support the main force by foraging and looting. Ravaging enemy lands may draw the opponent's forces away from the main objective, making the attackers' task easier, but the more distant the objective and more complex the plan, the more troops need to be assigned to such tasks. A specific example is enemy fortifications that the main force bypasses en route to its objectives. Such enemy strong points cannot simply be ignored lest they dispatch raiders to harass the invader or cut his supply lines. They and their garrisons must therefore be neutralized, usually by dispatching a small force either to pin them in place with the threat of battle, or else keep them busy with (threatened or actual) ravaging of the local environment should the defenders move away.

Only when the objective is an enemy town or castle, or when defending forces mass, does the main body of an army come into its own. Even here, though, conflict is often restricted to skirmishing, both sides frequently establishing fortified encampments and using skirmishers and artillery (or less overt means such as magic) to harass each other; directly engaging the opponent is a very bloody and risky way of ending a conflict. More often, the enemy can be persuaded to turn back by harassing or severing their supply lines (hence the importance of dealing with rear-area garrisons) or, as the Scots have proved adept at, staging counterinvasions into the opponent's territories to force them to withdraw or else suffer losses themselves. Such threats need not be real — they only need to be perceived as such. A threatened move by an army (or, as mentioned above, a subtle manipulation of the enemy's perceptions) can have the same effect, persuading the enemy to withdraw. Such concerns apply principally when the cause (and/or objective) of the conflict is resources. In political (and to a lesser extent religious) conflicts, the enemy's ability to wage war may be a primary objective and thus his military (and inevitably key cities and fortifications, as well as

key leaders) will be the principal target. In such conflicts, large battles may be inevitable.

In some areas, the very concept of massed armies goes against the local culture and established tradition. Instead, the light irregular forces are the main combatants, staging raids and counterraids against enemy territories, carrying off goods, animal and people. The Scots and Irish (and to a lesser extent the Welsh, as well as various groups in Eastern Europe and the Baltic) typify users of such tactics, resulting in more frequent conflicts but at a lower intensity and ferocity than occurs in the more "civilized" areas. The Garou follow similar principles, disparate packs likely to be involved in near-constant low-level conflicts — particularly in times when little outside threat is seen and challenges for leadership arise — rather than large-scale warfare. The number of casualties in such conflicts is usually much lower, as is the likelihood of noncombatants being harmed.

Areas with a tradition of raiding often pose a tricky problem to invaders who use massed armies — where no single enemy exists to target, the opponent cannot be brought to a decisive battle and crushed. Instead, the invading force usually suffers a host of minor wounds, not serious on their own but cumulatively posing a potential threat. For example, efforts by Cainite or Inquisition forces to eliminate werewolves in their domains are likely to be stalled by the disparate nature of the foe, with rarely more than a single pack committed to a battle (which is more than enough to challenge much larger opposing force). Exploitation of the environment (marshes, woodland, mountains) to give a strategic advantage is relatively uncommon in standard military thinking, though it often plays a major role at the tactical level, as is discussed in *Lay of the Land* (p. 28). Small, irregular forces are also able to exploit factors such as night to their advantage — armies are largely incapable of operation at night (as coordination is impossible), but no such restriction applied to small forces. Indeed, to Garou and Cainites, night is the best — and in the vampire's case only — time for conflicts to take place, concealing to some extent their inhuman nature.

## Battle Tactics

Though the best equipped and trained soldiers in the armies of Western Christendom, knights rarely operate alone and are dependent on supporting elements — light and heavy infantry, missile troops, artillery — if they are to prevail in a battle. Armies are thus almost always an amalgam of cavalry and infan-

try, incorporating a wide variety of troop types. The exact relationship between these forces varies considerably from region to region and from battle to battle.

In France and the Angevin domains, cavalry often deploys as the core of the army, with infantry and missile troops placed to protect its flanks. The cavalry can maneuver against the enemy, using its combination of speed and maneuverability to deadly effect, or can serve as a "lure" for enemy troops, drawing them into range of the missile troops who can prove devastating against enemy formations, particularly targeting cavalry to the advantage of their own mounted troops. Cavalry can also deploy on the flanks or be held in reserve, used to target the enemy's own flanks as opportunities arise. In large, well trained and organized formations, knightly cavalry is a potent weapon, serving as shock troops against the enemy army. The favored tactic is to charge enemy infantry, seeking to kill or demoralize opponents. The ultimate objective — not always achievable — is to cut though the enemy unit, inflicting grievous damage, then to stage a second charge into the rear of the decimated unit. Where this happens, the targeted infantry are likely to break and run. Unfortunately, where a unit resists the charge — and even if it breaks — each knight's individual efforts to slay the enemy frequently eliminates the cavalry's formation and maneuver advantages, shattering the formation and making it vulnerable to counterattack.

Cavalry can lure the enemy out of position (and in particular out of prepared defenses) by feigning retreat — such tactics served the Normans well at Hastings (although quite by accident). In defensive engagements, cavalry may remain mounted to provide a mobile flanking force and to launch tactical counterattacks, or some or all knights may fight dismounted. It should be noted that while knights are the principal mounted troops, elements among the foot soldiers — notably mercenary troops and elites such as crossbowmen — use horses for transport but fight on foot. Also, the warhorses ridden by many knights are trained to act as weapons in their own rights, biting, kicking and trampling the opposition. This certainly applies to the ghoul warhorses ridden by many Cainite knights and who bring supernatural strength and drive to encounters. As most animals can detect the true predatory nature of werewolves, Garou rarely serve as cavalry officers, though such individuals are not unheard of, particularly among the Warders of Men.

Foot soldiers fall into three distinct categories: light infantry, used to harass the enemy; heavy infan-

try, used to protect fortifications and serve in the main battle line; and missile troops. Unlike the cavalry, which is usually comprised of nobles, foot soldiers are usually commoners, though frequently these are professional soldiers rather than feudal levies. Knights can and do fight on foot as the situation necessitates, often providing much needed “backbone” to the lesser infantry. Often equipped with light missile weapons and little in the way of armor, light infantry are ill suited to the battlefield, though their mobility makes them ideal for harassing the opposition and for staging ambushes. Garou are the undoubtedly masters of such tactics, particularly the martial Silver Fangs, Fenrir and Shadow Lords. Cainites of the Low Clans often possess Disciplines that enhance these tactics, but are of course hampered by the fact that mortal battles are seldom fought after dark. In any case, the supernatural powers of such individuals give them a distinct advantage over mortal opponents and make them easily the equal of heavy infantry.

Better armed and armored, albeit at the expense of mobility, the *raison d'être* for heavy infantry is battle, particularly defense. They are ideal troops for protecting fixed positions or securing flanks against enemy attack, though they are vulnerable to maneuverable opponents and thus need to use terrain — or rely on allied troops, particularly cavalry — to protect their own flanks. Such troops can be equipped with spears, allowing them to defend themselves against cavalry, and disciplined spearmen can even hold their ground against a cavalry charge.

Missile troops, though the weakest troops in melee — most carry only a knife in addition to their bow or crossbow — are among the most important elements on the battlefield. Unlike other foot soldiers, they are well equipped to deal with enemy cavalry, targeting both knight and mount before they pose a threat to the army. The Mongols (and to a lesser extent some Eastern Europeans such as the Hungarians) employ horse-archers, individuals trained to ride and shoot at the same time, a tactic at which the steppes warriors are masters and against which the Western European concepts of war have little defense, as will be discovered to their cost at Liegnitz. Cainites have particular reason to fear missile troops — the risk of “accidental” staking is a major concern — and often go to extreme lengths to avoid being targeted by such troops. Artillery is most often used in sieges but may, on occasion, be used in battles, particularly the smaller and more easily transported weapons such as perriers (small hand-powered trebuchets) or the Muslim *qawa al-ziyar*. Many supernatural powers function in much the same way as artillery on the

battlefield. Rather than being limited to projectiles, such attacks can include the elemental forces via Pillars such as Summer or Vires or Cainite blood magic like Rego Tempestas.

Supernatural powers can also be of great advantage in coordinating a battle. A Cainite's Presence can allow him to impose his will on those under his command (and even the enemy), and likewise Pillars such as Al-Fatihah and even various of the inquisitors' Blessings can be used to coordinate actions in battle. Mortals without such abilities must rely on signals, usually flags, or else the sound of drums or horns.

## Those Who Fight

Four distinct groups make up an army: nobles, military orders, mercenary troops and levies. Of these, the military orders, mercenaries and nobles can be considered professional troops. In the case of nobles, training in warfare is part of their education from an early age, though not all such individuals have the aptitude or experience to be called professional. The military orders overlap somewhat with the nobility — most began their lives as such though they now answer to God and the Pope rather than temporal authorities — but have lifestyles more conducive to maintaining the physical and mental prowess required of warriors. Such groups incorporate numerous Cainite and Inquisitorial members, as well as no small number of mages (notably among the Templars). Garou are rarely found in the military orders (though some fight alongside the Livonian Sword Brethren), the rigid nature of the orders at odds with their temperaments and beliefs. Sometimes, however, werewolves take the role of noble knights, particularly the Shadow Lords and Silver Fangs, reflecting their power and influence as much as any adherence to the tenets of chivalry.

Mercenary troops, the third strand of professional soldiery, find disdain from the nobility but are both well equipped and experienced. These soldiers are a vital part of medieval armies, stiffening the resolve of feudal troops and providing valuable experience. Mercenary cavalry are sought after and highly regarded, frequently including noblemen forced to sell their services. Mercenary infantry, though effective, are widely despised; they are frequently ruthless and savage on the battlefield, hardened by a life of violence in the pursuit of wealth and constant pressure from the nobility. A werewolf who wishes, for whatever reason, to join an army would probably be best served to pose as a mercenary. The fearsome reputation of such men might help to explain the feeling of unease that people feel around the Garou, and the

mercenaries arguably enjoy the most freedom of any medieval warriors.

Levies are a broad category of troops but principally comprise the forces raised by a vassal as part of his feudal responsibilities to his liege. Some are full-time soldiers in the employ of their lord, notably the sergeants who train and lead lesser combatants, but many are peasant troops, trained and equipped as needed. The advantage of such troops lies with their numbers — the quantity of fully trained soldiers, particularly knights, remains roughly constant, excepting losses in battle, but peasant levies can be raised (and dismissed) almost as needed. Rural levies are often tied to a specific region and their members have to be released to tend their fields when their term of service expires. Indeed, the levies' increasing insistence on remaining near their home territories helps drive the use of mercenary troops. Urban militias are likewise bound to a specific geography, though their charters frequently require towns to provide their liege with significant military forces, usually drawn from the militia. Such troops, many of whom have served in the defense of their towns and are often called upon for castle guard duty, are surprisingly accomplished, particularly at defensive operations. Few of the supernatural forces of the Dark Medieval willingly take on the role of feudal levies, though in the clashes of the War of Princes, Cainite officers may find themselves assigned to command or oversee such forces (a responsibility they often pass on to retainers and ghouls). Werewolves may likewise watch over levy units, usually when their Kinfolk are involved.

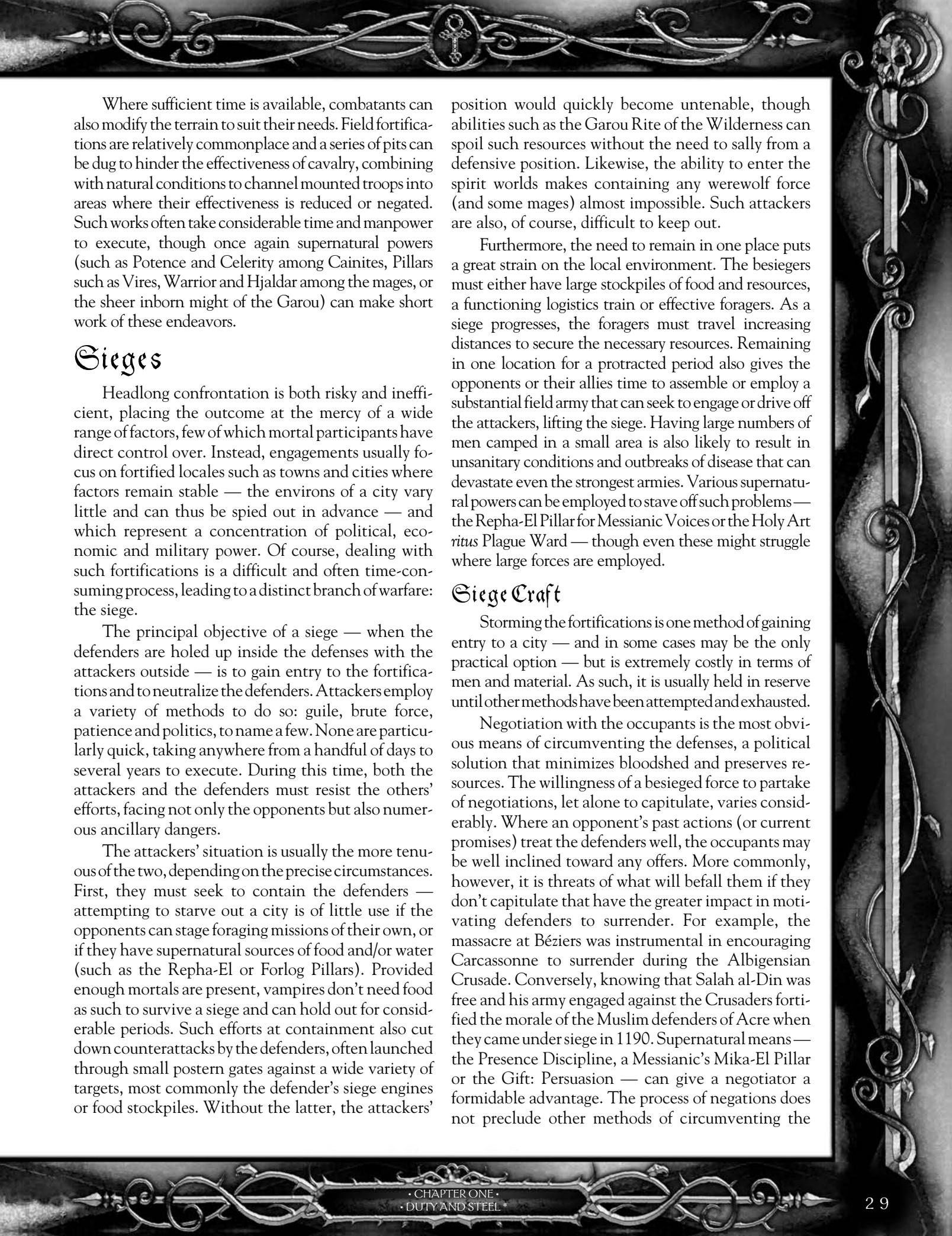
## Lay of the Land

The environment plays a significant role in warfare in the Dark Medieval, both on a strategic level, involving large-scale operations such as the campaign itself, and in a tactical role, governing actions on the battlefield or similar small-scale operations. At its most basic, the landscape channels invading armies into key areas — hills and mountains determine the main routes of advance and fords and bridges govern where rivers are most likely to be crossed. Enemy forces and fortifications are likely sited to exploit such channeling effects, allowing the concentration of forces where they can do most good. The tactic toward building fortifications in open terrain reflects a broad desire to use the environment to channel the opposition, in effect creating artificial obstacles from stone and mortar which an invader must deal with or risk endangering himself.

The effects of terrain on tactical concerns are more significant. For example, attacking uphill tires the assaulting troops and gives the defenders the benefit of height, and as such placing defensive forces on a hilltop (or more often a ridge) gives them an advantage. Likewise, fortifications placed atop a hill are generally harder to attack than those on a plain, and those atop a rocky outcrop even more so. For example, the small castles occupied by the Cathars in the Pyrenean foothills, such as Montségur and Quéribus, are made difficult to assail by their location atop rocky spurs and outcrops.

Even where the physical battle does not involve hills and the like, control of the high ground can play a major role in the conflict. The side controlling the high ground frequently has the advantage when it comes to observing the surroundings, particularly the activities and movement of opponents. Without friendly control of the high ground, the opposition can easily sneak forces into a position where they can attack the flanks or rear areas. Control of the high ground does not necessarily prevent such actions, but it can eliminate the advantage of surprise, allowing the defending force to take appropriate countermeasures.

"Impassable" ground such as rivers, marshes and forests plays an important role on the battlefield, providing an obstacle to enemy movement and an anchor for one or more flanks of an army. Battles are often planned with such factors in mind, freeing the troops placed alongside such terrain to concentrate on the battle. Some caution has to be exercised, however — though widely regarded as impassable, determined units can still pass through such terrain. In 1213, attacking through the supposedly impassable swamps near Muret allowed Simon de Montfort to strike the rear echelons of the Aragonese-Toulousian army, killing King Pedro II and breaking the power of the pro-Cathar nobles. Such terrain also serves as an ideal launching point for ambushes and guerrilla operations, as the Welsh repeatedly demonstrate to the invading English. Forcing an opponent to pass through a chokepoint created by the terrain can likewise neutralize the advantages of both size and maneuverability. Forces under the command of Aethelwulf, Mithras' Gangrel warlord, used such tactics in the conflict that wracked the Court of Avalon around 1215, notably at Oxford. There, the Saxon warlord forced the enemy to advance on a narrow front as they crossed the river, negating the rebels' advantage of cavalry and vastly superior numbers to win a decisive victory for the Prince of London.



Where sufficient time is available, combatants can also modify the terrain to suit their needs. Field fortifications are relatively commonplace and a series of pits can be dug to hinder the effectiveness of cavalry, combining with natural conditions to channel mounted troops into areas where their effectiveness is reduced or negated. Such works often take considerable time and manpower to execute, though once again supernatural powers (such as Potence and Celerity among Cainites, Pillars such as Vires, Warrior and Hjaldar among the mages, or the sheer inborn might of the Garou) can make short work of these endeavors.

## Sieges

Headlong confrontation is both risky and inefficient, placing the outcome at the mercy of a wide range of factors, few of which mortal participants have direct control over. Instead, engagements usually focus on fortified locales such as towns and cities where factors remain stable — the environs of a city vary little and can thus be spied out in advance — and which represent a concentration of political, economic and military power. Of course, dealing with such fortifications is a difficult and often time-consuming process, leading to a distinct branch of warfare: the siege.

The principal objective of a siege — when the defenders are holed up inside the defenses with the attackers outside — is to gain entry to the fortifications and to neutralize the defenders. Attackers employ a variety of methods to do so: guile, brute force, patience and politics, to name a few. None are particularly quick, taking anywhere from a handful of days to several years to execute. During this time, both the attackers and the defenders must resist the others' efforts, facing not only the opponents but also numerous ancillary dangers.

The attackers' situation is usually the more tenuous of the two, depending on the precise circumstances. First, they must seek to contain the defenders — attempting to starve out a city is of little use if the opponents can stage foraging missions of their own, or if they have supernatural sources of food and/or water (such as the Repha-El or Forlog Pillars). Provided enough mortals are present, vampires don't need food as such to survive a siege and can hold out for considerable periods. Such efforts at containment also cut down counterattacks by the defenders, often launched through small postern gates against a wide variety of targets, most commonly the defender's siege engines or food stockpiles. Without the latter, the attackers'

position would quickly become untenable, though abilities such as the Garou Rite of the Wilderness can spoil such resources without the need to sally from a defensive position. Likewise, the ability to enter the spirit worlds makes containing any werewolf force (and some mages) almost impossible. Such attackers are also, of course, difficult to keep out.

Furthermore, the need to remain in one place puts a great strain on the local environment. The besiegers must either have large stockpiles of food and resources, a functioning logistics train or effective foragers. As a siege progresses, the foragers must travel increasing distances to secure the necessary resources. Remaining in one location for a protracted period also gives the opponents or their allies time to assemble or employ a substantial field army that can seek to engage or drive off the attackers, lifting the siege. Having large numbers of men camped in a small area is also likely to result in unsanitary conditions and outbreaks of disease that can devastate even the strongest armies. Various supernatural powers can be employed to stave off such problems — the Repha-El Pillar for Messianic Voices or the Holy Artitus Plague Ward — though even these might struggle where large forces are employed.

## Siege Craft

Storming the fortifications is one method of gaining entry to a city — and in some cases may be the only practical option — but is extremely costly in terms of men and material. As such, it is usually held in reserve until other methods have been attempted and exhausted.

Negotiation with the occupants is the most obvious means of circumventing the defenses, a political solution that minimizes bloodshed and preserves resources. The willingness of a besieged force to partake of negotiations, let alone to capitulate, varies considerably. Where an opponent's past actions (or current promises) treat the defenders well, the occupants may be well inclined toward any offers. More commonly, however, it is threats of what will befall them if they don't capitulate that have the greater impact in motivating defenders to surrender. For example, the massacre at Béziers was instrumental in encouraging Carcassonne to surrender during the Albigensian Crusade. Conversely, knowing that Salah al-Din was free and his army engaged against the Crusaders fortified the morale of the Muslim defenders of Acre when they came under siege in 1190. Supernatural means — the Presence Discipline, a Messianic's Mika-El Pillar or the Gift: Persuasion — can give a negotiator a formidable advantage. The process of negotiations does not preclude other methods of circumventing the

fortifications and frequently serves as a preamble to the main siege, during which siege engines and other preparations are readied.

Subterfuge is the second major method of ending a siege, falling into two broad categories of action. The first involves agents inside the fortifications aiding the attackers, while the second involves infiltrating troops into the fortifications from outside. The first option can include bribing or blackmailing one or more people within the city to open gates or let down a rope, allowing the attackers to enter. The Cainite discipline of Domination and similar powers can also turn an unwitting inhabitant into a tool of the besiegers. The second method — infiltrating troops from outside unaided — is more difficult, depending on the identification and exploitation of some weakness in the fortification. A classic example of this is Chateau Gaillard in Normandy, besieged by the French King Philip Augustus in 1203, where modifications to the castle — notably the addition of a chapel — had created a fatal weakness in the defenses. A small group of sappers was able to crawl through a drain and into the chapel's crypt, from where, amid great confusion, they were able to rush the main gate and lower the drawbridge. Supernatural powers such as a Cainite's Obscure or a Spirit-Talker's Trickster Pillar can allow a stealthy entry into fortifications, though even this advantage pales into insignificance when compared to a Batini's Al-Hajj or a werewolf's ability to avoid inconveniences such as walls by traveling through the Umbra.

The slowest — but in the long run most effective — method is to outlast the defenders. At its most fundamental level, this involves starving out the defenders. The length of time a fortress can hold out depends on two factors — the size of the defenders' stockpiles (or access to new sources of supply such as animals and carrion or, in extreme cases, cannibalism) and the number of people they must feed. In mortal conflicts (and many of those involving supernatural agents), the ejection of noncombatants from a fortification either immediately before or during a siege is not uncommon, extending the length of time its soldiers can resist. Sometimes such refugees are allowed to pass through the besiegers' lines and flee the area, but not always. The defenders rarely allow such individuals back into their fortifications and the expelled group has little choice but to survive in the no-man's-land between the besiegers and the fortifications, slowly starving to death. Sieges involving Cainites are less likely to follow such practices; the inhabitants of the fortress are the vampire's source of nourishment.

Another "endurance" tactic is attempting to control access to water. Most fortifications, however, take precautions against this and have wells from which they can draw water despite being besieged. Fortresses without their own water sources are unlikely to resist for long. Disease — either naturally occurring due to unsanitary conditions or deliberately introduced by flinging animal carcasses into the city or its water supply — is one of the most insidious forms of endurance attack and one against which mortal defenders have little defense. If the defenders have access to supernatural powers such as the Warder tribe's Gift of Salt or the Messianic Voice's Repha-El Pillar, they can combat the threat of disease.

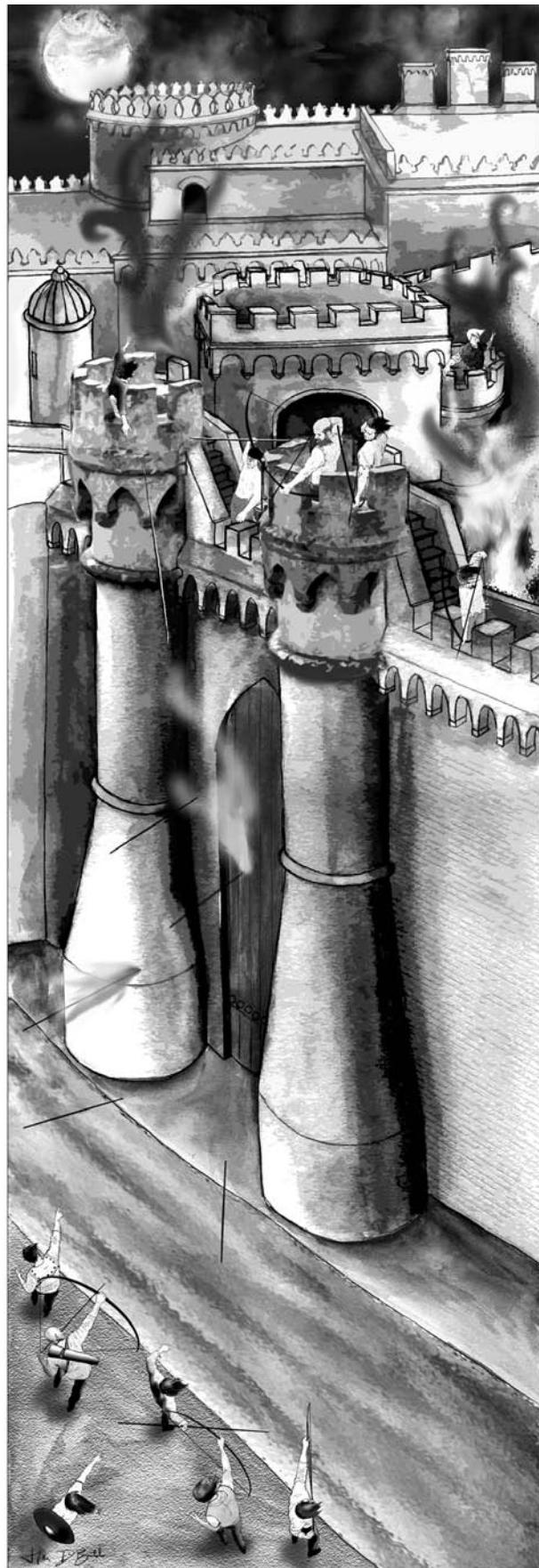
Force is the last resort of any siege, likely to cost the attackers dearly if the defender has sufficient numbers and is well trained and equipped. Commonly, the forceful approach employs one of three broad methods: going over, through, or under the defenses. Going over the walls requires either ladders or siege engines such as the *belfroi* (belfry or siege tower) that incorporate ladders, rams and even catapults. The former are the simplest option but are also the easiest to defeat, either pushed away by the defenders or targeted by missile attacks. To be effective, a ladder assault needs either surprise or overwhelming numbers (ideally both). Covered with wooden planks and damp hides, siege towers provide the attackers with more protection during their attack but require level ground to approach the walls, necessitating the infilling of ditches or moats. Despite their coverings, *belfroi* are extremely vulnerable to incendiary weapons, particularly the Greek fire used by the Byzantines and the Muslim forces. The least common option, requiring a lot of time and vast numbers of men, is to build a ramp up the walls. With the workers under constant attack from the fortifications, this is a very costly method and rarely used on its own. Instead, a ramp might be constructed to aid the employment of another tool — a *belfroi* or a battering ram, for example — rather than as a means of ingress in its own right. Physical barriers are less of a problem to many supernatural forces; whether by incredible strength or less overt means, most such beings have methods of bypassing walls.

Going under the walls is the most effective but labor-intensive method of ending a siege. It involves tunneling under the walls of the fortification and either collapsing them to allow troops to enter or else providing a means of circumventing the defenses entirely. Though simple in principal, such methods — collectively known as sapping — require considerable

knowledge and skill. The sappers need to understand the terrain and the methods of tunneling through it, as well as the structural weaknesses of the fortification they are seeking to undermine. Mages with mastery over the elements — such as a Hermetic familiar with the Pillar of Vires — have great advantages in such work. Cainites who know the Thaumaturgy path of Rego Elementum also have an advantage as sappers, able to summon elementals to do their bidding. Ideally, the sappers dig a tunnel to the fortification (or may, with suitable protection, simply dig at the base of the wall). Once underneath the target, they expand their workings, shoring them up with timbers as they go. When sufficient of the defenses are undermined, the sappers set the supports alight (usually after coating them with fat to help them burn), hoping to cause the workings and the fortification to collapse.

Defenders can use a number of countermeasures against sappers. Some are design considerations — walls became wider at the base to make them harder to undermine, castles were built on solid rock or where tunnels would flood such as flood plains — but detecting and then dealing with sappers is an important task. The simplest method is to place containers of water on the walls and then to observe them for signs of activity under the walls which cause them to shake and cause ripples in the water. Of course, magic and supernatural powers such as Auspex can vastly simplify this tedious but necessary task. Once a mining attempt is detected, the defenders can dig a countermine, seeking to attack the sappers and destroy their workings before they complete their task. Numerous methods can be used to engage the sappers — troops can be sent into the tunnels to fight the sappers; the tunnels can be flooded or filled with smoke and noxious vapors. Countermines are not, however, without their risk. Dug in haste, collapse, an ever-present threat, can kill the defenders' own sappers while doing little to slow those of the attacker. Another possibility is that the troops in the countermining assault can lose the underground battle, particularly if mortals are pitted against supernatural opponents, in the process giving the attackers a means of entry to the fortifications. Because of this risk, countermines are usually closely guarded until the enemy workings are dealt with.

Bombardment is the fourth and final method of siege warfare, involving projectile attacks against the castle or town. Most attacks target the fortifications, lobbing darts and stones of various sizes (up to 500 lbs. in the largest trebuchets) against the walls and towers, while many siege engines can throw incendiary ammunition against vulnerable





structures. Greek fire is a favored weapon in this, difficult to extinguish and causing great fear (as well as damage) among the population, particularly the Cainites for whom other weapons are of only limited concern. Bombardment can also be used for less obvious attacks. Psychological warfare against the inhabitants of a castle or town might involve throwing the captured soldiers — living or dead — into the fortifications, or doing the same with the heads of slain prisoners. The besiegers might throw human or animal bodies into the target, seeking to spread disease.

Most sieges don't employ only one of the above methods but rather use a combination. Negotiations then psychological warfare may be used at first, followed by bombardment of the walls while sappers dig underneath, all the while the defenders are denuding their food supply. As a result of the sapping (or bombardment), the attackers may storm the city, but if not (or if the storming attempt fails) they may return to negotiation.

## Siege Engines

Siege engines are rarely transported whole but rather are moved disassembled or else built with key components and local material. In Western Europe, where trees are plentiful, little problem exists with this, but in Outremer suitable materials are harder to obtain locally and must usually be brought with the attackers to a siege. The main disadvantage of siege engines is the lack of maneuverability, making them vulnerable to sallies by the defenders or else to attack by the defenders' own siege weapons. As a result, placing such weapons so that they can be used effectively while minimizing their exposure to the enemy is a major challenge for an army commander. Four broad categories of siege engine exist: pendulum, tension, torsion and counterweight.

**Pendulum** siege engines include those that are swung at the target. Most notable is the *battering ram*, often little more than a log capped with metal, though sometimes fitted with an ornately carved "beak" to allow it to dig into walls. The number of men required to operate a ram varies depending on its size, ranging from a dozen to a hundred. Such individuals are dangerously exposed to the defenders' countermeasures (see p. 33) and usually shelter under a wheeled wooden framework known as a *sow*. Another pendulum device is the *mouse*, designed for hacking at a wall rather than battering it. The least common device is the *crow*, used against small or ill-built fortifications to hook onto the

battlements and to pull them (and sometimes the wall) down.

**Tension** siege engines rely on the bow principal to propel their projectiles. The best-known example is the *ballista*, which in effect is a very large catapult. Some catapults also use the bow principal to propel a throwing arm, though most such devices use the torsion method. As with bows, tension weapons are less effective in inclement weather, as the rain allows the bowstring to stretch.

**Torsion** devices rely on twisted cords of hemp, hair or leather for their power. The throwing arm of the weapon is thrust through such cords and then pulled back (usually via a winch) and locked in place. Releasing the lock causes the twisted fibers to return to their former position, throwing the arm — and any loaded projectile — forward. The most notable of these devices is the *mangonel*, more commonly called a catapult. Such devices are effective against fortifications but require trained engineers to build and operate them. As with tension devices, torsion engines are adversely affected by inclement weather that allows the cords to stretch and lose effectiveness. The *espringal* is much smaller than the mangonel but uses the torsion principal to propel a large spear (or a flask of Greek fire) with great force and accuracy.

**Counterweight** weapons are the only siege engines developed in the Middle Ages — the others are of Roman origin — and use the principle of levers to hurl projectiles at their targets. The prime example is the *trebuchet*. Some counterweight engines use a combination of weights and muscle power to throw the projectile, while others rely on weights alone. Due to the vagaries of timing and endurance, muscle-powered weapons (which include the small *perrier*) are less accurate than those that use weights and thus tend to be less widespread. Weight-only trebuchets can be fine-tuned with the addition of small weights, allowing them to throw projectiles with consistent accuracy (assuming projectile mass and shape, as well as wind strength and speed, are roughly constant also), making them the ideal weapon for targeting specific parts of a fortification. Furthermore, the projectiles thrown by such weapons are larger than those propelled by other weapons, up to 500 lb. in some cases.

None of the above devices, regardless of construction or propulsion method, can be used to attack a moving target without supernatural enhancement.

## ON GUNPOWDER

In the early 13th century, the principles of gunpowder are just being learned in the Dark Medieval (in Europe at least). The first cannon — called a pot-de-fer — is used in combat in the early 14th century. The power of magic, however, has allowed mages to fashion such weapons, and a number of cannon were used during the destruction of the Mistridge Covenant in 1210 and may well be used in future conflicts.

Unfortunately for the attackers, those within the fortification have a number of weapons at their disposal intended to limit the effectiveness of siege engines or to hamper efforts to scale the walls. Boiling oil, heated sand and quicklime are poured onto those attempting to scale the walls or to batter down the walls or gates, while grapples might be

used to seize hold of a battering ram or mouse. Pads of straw or wood can be lowered in front of a ram so as to soften its blow, while prior to the siege pits can be dug to hinder the use of *beffroi*.

## Fortifications

Though fortifications have long played a role in warfare, the Crusades have led to a renaissance in the methods and techniques used to build defenses. The main elements of a fortification are listed in the Introduction.

### Example: Chateau Gaillard

#### Outer Ward

The wedge-shaped Outer Ward sits southeast of the main body of the castle, guarding the approaches. It has three principal walls: the northeast (two Medium Wall sections), northwest (two Medium Wall sections) and south (two Medium Wall sections).

## SIEGE WEAPONS

Siege Weapon	Damage	Rate	Range	Difficulty
Battering Ram	10L	N/A	N/A	0
Mouse (small ram)	7L	N/A	N/A	0
Crow	8L	N/A	N/A	0
Mangonel (Catapult)	14L	1/6	300	+2
Ballista	12L	1/6	300	+2
Espringal	10L	1/5	300	+1
Counterweight Trebuchet	15L	1/7	400	+1
Pulled Trebuchet	13L	1/6	250	+3
Perrier	8L	1/4	100	+1
Pot-de-fer	10L	1/5	500	+2
Qawa al-ziyar	12L	1/5	400	+1
Greek Fire Spigot	10A	1/2	30	+2

## Other Weapons

Weapon	Damage	Rate	Range	Difficulty
Boiling Oil	8A*	1/10	N/A	+1
Quicklime	4L*	1/10	N/A	+3
Heated Sand	6A*	1/10	N/A	+1
Greek Fire	10A	By weapon	N/A	0

\*Armor may not soak this damage

Quicklime “attacks” any characters, friend or foe, between the point of release and 10 feet downwind. If any wounds occur as a result of a quicklime attack, the victim is blinded.

Heated sand “attacks” any characters, friend or foe, between the point of release and 10 feet downwind.

Greek fire burns for five rounds, inflicting damage in each round. Pots of Greek fire may be hand-thrown or propelled by siege engines.

## FORTIFICATIONS

Structure	Soak	Health Levels	Feat of Strength Target
Light Wall (50')	7*	14	14
Medium Wall (50')	10*	20	15
Heavy Wall (50')	12*	30	N/A
Small Tower	8*	12	14
Medium Tower	10*	24	15
Large Tower	12*	36	N/A
Filled tower (mod to above)	+2	+25%	N/A
Wooden Palisade (50')**	5*	9	9
Small Wooden Tower**	7*	10	10
Large Wooden Tower**	9*	20	11
Small Keep	10*	30	13
Large Keep	15*	50	14
Ditch (50')	N/A	N/A	N/A
Moat (50')	N/A	N/A	N/A
Small gatehouse	8*	15	14
Medium gatehouse	10*	25	15
Large gatehouse	12*	35	N/A
Small gate	4	8	7
Large gate	7	10	8
Portcullis	6	14	12 (11 to lift)
Small wooden building**	4	6	7
Large wooden building**	6	9	8
Fired brick building**	5	9	9
Small stone building	5	7	13
Medium stone building	10	14	14
Large stone building	15	21	15
Small church	8	15	13
Large church	12	30	14

**Soak:** Each success on a soak roll counts as two successes against siege engines, and four successes vs. other weapons.

**Health Levels:** The number of damage successes a structure can absorb before giving way. For buildings, each wall is considered to have the listed number of health levels, although the Storyteller can rule that a building collapses after suffering too much damage. Breaking through these structures is an extended action, with each roll indicating anywhere from 15 minutes to an hour of work (this requires tools). Alternatively, each roll can represent one attack by an appropriate siege engine.

Ditches and moats do not have health levels but can block the passage of siege engines and troops unless filled in.

**Feat of Strength:** The Strength required on a Feat of Strength roll to break through the listed structure.

\*Foot soldiers shooting from such a structure may add this soak value to their own when targeted by missile fire.

\*\*Vulnerable to fire. Half soak vs. incendiary weapons.

Situated at each corner of the wedge are towers (Medium on the north and west corners, and a Large Tower in the south corner). A Large Gatehouse sits in the center of the northwest wall.

#### Middle Ward (NW of Outer Ward)

The Middle Ward forms the main body of Chateau Gaillard, located on a spur above the Seine. It has five main walls: southeast (two Medium Wall sections), northeast (two Medium Wall sections), north (two Medium Wall sections), southwest (two Medium Wall sections) and south (two Medium Wall sections). Towers (all Medium) stand at the corners of the southeast and northeast, northeast and north, southwest and south, and south and southeast walls. A Large Gatehouse sits in the center of the southeast wall, linking the Middle Ward to the Outer Ward, while a chapel (Small Church) sits in the southern corner of the Middle Ward.

#### Inner Ward (Inside Middle Ward)

The Inner Ward is the defensive heart of Chateau Gaillard, situated atop a rough motte. It has three main walls—south (Heavy Wall), east (Heavy Wall) and north (Heavy Wall). A gateway (Medium Gatehouse) sits in the center of the north wall, while a keep (Small Keep) is built into the south wall.

## The Economics of War

Waging war is a costly proposition, usually carried out only by the wealthy or when considerable riches are up for grabs. Indeed, even the richest lords can be made paupers by an ill-conceived or disastrous campaign, and in the worst cases whole countries can be stretched to their financial limits in order to pay for the wars or their aftermaths.

## The Spoils of War

Plunder and its attainment are major driving forces behind warfare. Warriors travel vast distances — even crossing seas — in search of wealth and



prosperity. The best-known examples are the Vikings, whose raids terrorized Europe, reaching even into the Mediterranean. Though the threat of the Norsemen has declined, plunder remains an important part of an army's recompense, helping to defray the costs of the endeavor. Soldiers frequently receive financial or material remuneration for their roles in a campaign, the amount in proportion to their contributions and standing. The contracts of mercenary troops may even stipulate the amount and value of booty they may claim as part of the payment for their services.

This material comes from two sources: the general population and the battlefield. The former often forms part of the foraging and pillaging that accompanies an army on the move while the latter includes arms, armor and animals seized from those fallen or captured on the battlefield. The monarch and the nobles leading the campaign take the lion's share of any plunder with the remainder then split between the lower-ranked officers and last of all the soldiers. The exact proportions vary, but the most senior nobles usually share around half the loot between themselves, with increasingly smaller proportions for the lower ranks. Physical equipment, though divided according to agreed guidelines (and the finest pieces granted to the high-ranking officers), generally goes to lower-ranked knights and soldiers, while more senior officers rely on the ransoms paid to them in exchange for freeing high-ranking nobles who fall into their possession (see Ransom in Chapter Three).

## Logistics

A man can carry several days' worth of food on his back — perhaps enough for a week or a fortnight — but for longer campaigns, his needs must be met from other sources. Some nobles do organize the logistics of their armies, but doing so is difficult and time consuming, not to mention expensive. Richard the Lionhearted's provisions for seaborne resupply of his troops as they marched down the coast of the Levant were a notable exception to the prevailing attitude. Most armies live off the land, foraging for the food and resources they need. As such, some times of year are more conducive to campaigning than others, though most often the "foraging parties" simply raid the supplies of the villages and towns they pass. As a result, the passage of an army causes considerable hardship to the lands through which they pass, devastating the land for miles around.

Soldiers raid villages and unwalled towns for supplies. In doing so, they destroy the defenders'

landed wealth. Soldiers also burn villages, uproot orchards and vineyards, and destroy mill dams out of spite or revenge, or to force a reluctant foe into battle to protect his lands.

Sometimes a defender will try to channel or block an attacker by destroying his own villages first in a "scorched earth" tactic. This is a desperate, sometimes successful, move. Firing a town in advance of the attacker also destroys any booty, the promise of which is vital to maintaining the army.

A defender may also attack the foraging parties piecemeal. An army that's forced to stay in one place during a siege will have to send its raiding parties ever further from the main force as it consumes supplies. As the forces are dispersed, they are more vulnerable to attack.

Cainites, mages, werewolves and even some inquisitors often have abilities to project their senses at great ranges. These abilities are invaluable for scouting and even more valuable in directing foraging parties away from danger and to the best supplies. Conversely, such characters are ideally situated to ambush foraging parties when they are most vulnerable.

Foraging slows the speed at which an army can move, the foraging parties (where they are organized) having to travel far and wide in search of resources and then transport them back to the army. At best, an army moves 10-15 miles per day. Defenders can exploit this situation to their advantage, using the attackers' logistical needs against them. Resources and people may be gathered into fortified sites (castles, towns etc.) and thus protected against the depredations of the foragers, while such sites also provide secure bases from which raiders can attack foraging parties. A defender can ravage his own lands so that the defender can draw little or no sustenance from them, a tactic used by Salah al-Din to stall the Christian advance on Jerusalem during the Third Crusade. In extreme cases, a defender may even poison wells and other sources of fresh water.

Foraging troops rarely distinguish between friendly and enemy territory, ravaging both in their quest for food and plunder. This saves the armies money but causes considerable resentment among the population and their lords. Even "friendly" territory may rebel if too badly treated, and thus competent and experienced generals seek to minimize their impact on friendly lands (and even foreign territories). This usually takes the form of quotas of supplies — either paid for or requisitioned — in exchange for keeping the troops in line. Unfortunately, ensuring the behavior of the troops (who

still desire plunder, irrespective of their lords' wishes) usually requires a substantial increase in wages as well as punishments such as flogging and branding, and ultimately execution by hanging; many soldiers regard plunder and their domination of the peasantry as one of the perks of their position.

For more on logistics, see Chapter Three.

## The Waging of War at Sea

Naval warfare plays an important role in military actions. Many campaigns are possible only because of naval vessels (e.g., as transports) or are made much easier by the involvement of ships (e.g., providing logistics or "artillery" support). Vessels can also operate entirely on their own, most notably the mix of mortal and supernatural raiders who ply the waters of the Mediterranean.

### Types of Ships

In the enclosed waters of the Mediterranean, the principal form of vessel developed since the Roman era is the galley. The Byzantines are the prime proponents of galleys in naval warfare, fielding a wide range of designs. These use oars as their primary motive power, usually in banks of two or three oars but sometimes as many as four. Such vessels also have sails to allow them to move long distances quickly and without exhausting the crew, but they usually fight and maneuver "under oars." The use of oars allows such vessels to make radical maneuvers — they can spin on the spot if needed — and unlike a sailing ship, they can move backward. Not dependent on outside forces, they are also free to act irrespective of wind direction and strength. The most common forms of galley are known as *dromons*, up to 150 feet long and with up to 100 oars in two or three banks. Smaller galleys are called *sagitta* and usually serve as scouts, while massive shallow-draft transports known as *starida* allow troops to be deployed on the shore without a dock. Galleys used by the Muslim navies go by the name *qadirga* (*dromon* equivalents) or *harraqa* (*sagitta* equivalents). Such vessels are usually armed with heavy crossbows such as the espringal, though larger examples may be equipped with mangonels and pots of Greek fire, and the troops on board can also use bows to attack. Many navies of the Dark Medieval employ professional crossbowmen for such tasks but some, notably the Aragonese, require the oarsmen to double as missile troops.



Galleys are ill suited to operations in the open ocean and instead sailing vessels predominate in such regions. The most common form is the “round ship” (named so because they are usually as tall as they are wide) that varies considerably in size and form.. The principal round-ship design is the cog, which appears in a range of sizes. Cogs mainly serve as merchant vessels but are easily converted into fighting ships. They employ a rudder at the back of the ship rather than the large oar style common in older designs like the *longship*, which remains in service in various forms in northern Europe. Compared to galleys, round ships are ungainly but resilient.

Both types of vessel make use of pseudofortifications at the fore and/ or aft ends of their decks. These “fighting castles” give missile troops a degree of protection from enemy fire and are often permanent features of the vessels. Some ships — mainly galleys — feature a bow-mounted *calcar*, more commonly known as a beak. Though developed from the rams popular in Roman times, these are not intended as a weapon but rather as a means of boarding an enemy vessel — the beak hooks over the enemy’s bulwarks and allows boarders to cross to the “captured” vessel.

## Naval Tactics

As a general rule, the Mediterranean kingdoms have longer and greater experience at naval warfare matters as a result of their Roman heritage, and the acknowledged masters, apart from the Vikings, were the Byzantines, though various Italian states (notably the Venetians, Genoese and Neapolitans) are also accomplished sailors. Perhaps surprisingly given their hegemony over much of the Mediterranean coastline, Islamic forces are inexperienced at such forms of warfare, at least in fleet actions, though Salah al-Din made an effort to rectify this, assembling a fleet to challenge the Crusaders and to liberate those ports in Christian hands. This is, of course, an oversimplification; some Muslim groups, notably those recently conquered on Majorca, are expert seamen, making a profitable existence from piracy. Nonetheless, in the eastern Mediterranean, the advantage lies solidly with the Christian forces.

In the Atlantic and North Sea, one might find considerable experience of seamanship but relatively little in actual naval combat. Instead, ships play a major role in logistics and supporting land campaigns and the naval battles that do take place are usually aimed at disrupting such operations. The Battle of Sandwich in August of 1217 was an example of such

an operation, Hubert de Burgh drove off the French fleet that sought to resupply the French invasion force, contributing to the subsequent decision by Prince Louis to withdraw.

In both areas, supernatural beings can also be found commanding or crewing vessels. Lasombra pirates are the scourges of the nighttime seas in the western Mediterranean, working with ghoul crews who oversee daytime matters. Though these Cainites are renowned as pirates, their aversion to sunlight hampers their effectiveness. Mages, however, suffer no such problem, and the Repha-El, Vires or Fara Pillars make fearsome sailors. The Garou, too, are no strangers to the sea; the Bone Gnawers and the Fenrir have been plying the waves for time out of mind.

## Fleet Tactics

Large fleet actions are rare, even in the Mediterranean, and most naval combat occurs between a small number of vessels, usually as a result of a surprise attack — the “ambushing” fleet hidden behind an island or headland or via magic — or after a long chase. In naval actions, vessels attempt to keep together, providing mutual aid with their hand missile weapons and siege engines. When galley and roundship forces operate together, the former exploit their maneuverability and speed to protect their ungainly comrades.

Where the objective is simply to sink the opposition, incendiary weapons are extremely effective, be they burning arrows, Greek fire or flames called by magic, the rigging and sails being particularly vulnerable to such attacks. Some vessels may be deliberately set alight and sailed into the enemy fleet with the intent of causing fires on the target vessels. Summoned elementals of fire and water can be likewise used to cripple or sink enemy vessels.

Attempts to capture an opposing vessel require the attacker to ram the target (using a beak or a ram) or else pull alongside and grapple it. Troops may then swing, climb or jump onto the opposing vessel and seek to take control. In such battles, the advantage usually lies with the vessel with the larger crew, but the presence of trained soldiers — or supernatural crew — can negate or even overcome the advantage of numbers. Enclosed structures such as cabins or “castles” serve as defensive hard-points in such engagements, allowing the defenders to hold out against larger numbers while hoping for assistance from their allies. Both sides in a boarding action can use irregular weapons in their effort — quicklime (see p. 33) is a favored tool, blown on the wind and intended to blind

the enemy. Supernatural methods for overwhelming the opposing crew's psyche — a Cainite's Presence, a Hermetic's Corona Pillar or the overwhelming effect of the Delirium — are also extremely effective in boarding actions.

## Raiding

Raiding and piracy are commonplace in the Dark Medieval, lone vessels or small groups prowling the seas seeking plunder or to distract the enemy. The Balearic Islands and the Aegean are notorious havens of pirates, who prey on passing shipping and raid coastal settlements. In many cases, this piracy serves as a cover for the actions of local lords against their neighbors — notably the "pirates" of the Balearics after their capture by Aragon.

The Crusaders have also used naval raids to keep their opponents off balance. Reynauld de Châtillon staged one such mission along the coasts of the Red Sea in the early 1180s, targeting Muslim sites and attempting to draw off forces that would otherwise be directed at the Crusader kingdoms. While the Ashirra and Christian Cainites ply the waters of the Mediterranean, their endeavors in the Red Sea are hampered by the Keening that emanates from Mecca, situated close to the Eastern shore of the Red Sea. This limits Cainite sailors to the northern and southern extremities, making mages and the occasional werewolf the principal supernatural forces in the Red Sea.

## Combined Arms

The most common use of naval power in the Dark Medieval is as an adjunct for forces on land, either actively or passively. Passive support includes transportation of personnel, equipment and supplies and is the most common form. It is particularly important in the Crusades; with the land crossing of Asia Minor difficult and dangerous, control of the Levant ports is vital to the Crusader states, as they are the points through which reinforcements and supplies flow. Transport vessels are vital in supporting besieged coastal forces, shipping in food, supplies and fresh troops, and allowing the injured (as well as non-combatants) to withdraw in relative safety. Only where the opposition can muster a large blockading force can coastal cities and fortifications be truly besieged.

More actively, naval vessels can be used to land troops on the beach, either in a peaceful manner as the Normans did at Pevensey in 1066, having time to marshal their forces, or directly into combat as at Constantinople in 1204. Both infantry and horsemen can be transported in such a manner while others carry

the components of siege engines and supplies. Siege engines can also be directly incorporated into the structures of the ships. At Constantinople, several Venetian ships had integral siege towers that were used to assault the fortifications. On other occasions, vessels incorporated "flying bridges" into their deck castles, allowing troops to launch themselves directly onto the walls and towers of the enemy city. Even when not used by troops to attack fortifications, such towers — and the "fighting tops" built into many vessels — gave attacking missile troops a substantial height advantage against their foes. Some vessels carry compact siege engines like mangonels and even small trebuchets. These fighting tops also provide mages and Cainite blood magicians with a vantage point for their enchantments.

Countering the advantages of a ship is usually possible only with another vessel, though some tactics have been developed to secure harbors against predation by raiders and invasion forces. Acre and Damietta suspend chains across the mouths of their harbors to prevent enemy forces from simply sailing into them and then storming the city from the docks. During the Fifth Crusade, the Egyptians used a similar technique to prevent Christian ships from sailing down the Nile, sinking blocked ships in key channels to impede enemy passage.

## Systems

While many of the activities of war can be replicated using the standard Storyteller systems, some require additional rules and systems. Below are guidelines to model battles, sieges and naval engagements in the Storyteller system, though if the numbers and systems get in the way of roleplaying, the Storyteller is free to adapt or even ignore them in the interests of keeping the game flowing.

### New Skill: Seamanship

Seamanship covers ship-handling and sea lore. It incorporates the ability to navigate a vessel, operational skills such as rope handling, load balancing and maintenance, and the ability to maneuver a ship in battle.

- Dabbler: You know which end of a boat is the front.
- Student: You can furl a sail and steer the boat without endangering yourself or your comrades.
- Learned: You are a competent seaman and know many of the routes and dangers.
- Scholar: You know exactly how far you can push a boat and its crew to peak performance.

## SHIPS OF THE DARK MEDIEVAL

Name	Role	Power (Speed)	Maneuverability	Crew	Arms	Soak	Health	Notes
Levels*								
Longship	Cargo Vessel	Oars (4)/Sail (4)	+2	65	None	4	6	Shallow draft.
Cog (small)	Cargo Vessel	Sail (3)	+1	30	1 x Espringal	8	10	Fore and Aft Castles
Cog (large)	Cargo Vessel	Sail (3)	0	70	1 x Mangonel	10	14	Fore and Aft Castles
Galley (Dromon) Warship	Warship	Oars (3)/Sail (3)	+1	180	1 Mangonel, 2 x Espringal	9	10	Carries 50 soldiers
Galley (Sagitta)	Small warship	Oars (4)/Sail (5)	+2	80	2 x Espringal	7	6	Carries 20 soldiers
Galley (Tarida)	Cargo Vessel	Oars (3)/Sail (3)	+1	120	None.	8	8	Carries 300 soldiers or 100 horses. Shallow draft.
Qayiq	Cargo Vessel	Sail (3)	+2	30	2 x Espringal	7	8	Carries 30 soldiers

\*Each level of damage sustained by the vessel reduces its maneuverability rating and speed by 1. When no health levels remain, the vessel sinks.

•••• Master: You know every rock and current from the Shetlands to the Red Sea and can survive even the greatest storms.

Possessed by: Merchants, Shipwrights, Fishermen, Pirates

Specialties: Sailing, Rowing, Open Ocean, Inland Waterways, Navigation, Portage

## Battle

Battles involve a mix of individual skills, usually on the part of army or detachment leaders, and abstraction. The number of fighters involved is too great to allow the actions of each to be factored in.

• Foraging [Perception + Survival]: Foraging is vital to an army, providing most of the food and goods it needs to remain functional. Without sufficient supplies, hunger and dissent quickly reduce an army's effectiveness, turning it into little more than a mob. A well prepared army organizes dedicated teams of foragers rather than requiring each member to search for his own sustenance, which would shatter the army's cohesion. Such teams usually number dozens of men and wagons, some searching for food and supplies and others providing security against those seeking to prevent the foraging. Twice per day, the player controlling the leader of each foraging team should make a Perception + Survival roll, multiplying the number of successes by the number of foragers to determine the number of man-days of supplies acquired. The difficulty of the foraging effort depends on the prevailing conditions. In rich farmland during the harvest season, it may be as low as 4, or as high as 9 in a desert where the wells have been tainted to prevent their use and any caches of food removed. In average conditions — farm- or woodland in summer — the difficulty is

6. Numerous supernatural powers can aid foraging — an inquisitor's Water-to-Wine Benediction or an Old Faith mage's Summer Pillar — though the exact impact on the difficulty of foraging is at the Storyteller's discretion.

• Maintaining Order [Charisma + Leadership/Manipulation + Intimidation]: Keeping order in an army on the move and limiting plundering is a difficult but necessary task. Failure to do so both denudes the army's strength and poses grave political difficulties for the army commander. The player whose character leads the army (or the Storyteller) must roll Charisma + Leadership (if the leader seeks to use persuasion) or Manipulation + Intimidation (if he uses punishments and "object lessons") once per week. The difficulty of this endeavor remains constant at 6, though the number of successes required to keep order varies depending on the circumstance. Where the troops are well paid and supplied, only one success is needed per week, while in "normal" conditions where pay and resources are mediocre, two are required. Where pay and supply are poor or nonexistent, the leader requires four successes to maintain control. Add any deficit to the difficulty of all the army's actions for the next week. For example, if four successes are needed but the player rolls only two, the army's actions are all at +2 difficulty for the next week.

• Scouting [Perception + Stealth]: Up-to-date knowledge of the lay of the land and the enemy's dispositions are almost as important as the quality and quantity of troops in the army. As such, spies and scouts accompany the force, ranging considerable distances from the main body of the army to gather information on the prevailing conditions. This information gathering requires a Perception + Stealth roll

(difficulty 7), each success granting the commander an additional die to any rolls involving his strategy.

• **Strategy [Intelligence + Strategy]:** The overall shape and aims of a campaign, as well as the details of its execution, can have widespread implications on its success. No matter how brilliant a plan, if it is executed poorly or does not adapt to the prevailing conditions the result can be disastrous. Conversely, even a brilliant general struggles to prevail if forced to follow a poorly conceived strategy. To reflect this, make extended and opposed Intelligence + Strategy rolls using the abilities of the opposing generals at the start of each week of campaigning. The net difference in successes reflects the relative dispositions of the two forces and has an impact in the battle resolution systems (see p. 45).

## Siege

The most common form of conflict in the Dark Medieval, sieges are also the most complex and difficult forms of warfare to organize—the besieger must not only seek to eliminate the defender but must also secure his own position against a host of insidious threats.

• **Averting Disease [Wits + Medicine]:** Once an army is camped, disease is the most dangerous killer among the troops, reflecting the usually unsanitary conditions in which they reside. With appropriate care, the threat of disease can be mitigated, though rarely eliminated. Once per week, roll the Wits + Medicine of the commander or his designated medical overseer against a difficulty equal to the number of troops in the army divided by 1,000 (round fractions up, minimum difficulty of 4, maximum of 10). Provided the roll nets at least one success, no outbreak of disease occurs. In the event of a failure, the army suffers a +1 difficulty on all rolls made during the next week (including any rolls to avoid or contain outbreaks). If the roll fails a second time, the penalty increases to +2, a third time +3, and so forth. When a disease outbreak is already in progress, a successful roll may contain or neutralize a disease outbreak. If the number of successes is equal to or greater than the current penalty, reduce the penalty by one.

*For example, an army of 12,000 troops besiege a city. The difficulty of the roll is 10 (12,000 divided by 1,000 is 12, but the maximum difficulty is 10). The commander's player rolls Wits + Medicine (five dice) but achieves no successes. The army suffers a minor outbreak inflicting a +1 difficulty to all the army's actions. In the second week, the roll nets a single success; as the current disease penalty is only +1, this is sufficient to neutralize the outbreak.*

• **Building Siege Engines [Perception + Crafts/ Intelligence + Crafts]:** Assembling a siege engine de-

pends on two factors—appropriate knowledge and the availability of raw materials. Finding and transporting appropriate raw materials requires a foraging team to make a Perception + Crafts roll (difficulty 7). The team must accumulate a number of successes equal to the damage rating of the engine they wish to build (see the table on p. 33). Such rolls may be made once per day, during which time the team cannot forage for food (of course, multiple teams can search and therefore pool their successes). Once appropriate materials have been found, they must be assembled into a working engine, requiring an extended Intelligence + Crafts (siege engines) roll also against a difficulty of 7. Such rolls may be made weekly. The number of successes required to build each engine is the same as the number required to find materials: equal to the engine's damage rating (so a counterweight trebuchet requires 15 successes). A botch at any point during construction destroys the engine, wasting the materials and all the successes invested in its construction. The number of successes required to find materials for and assemble a *belfroi* depends on its size—anywhere from 10–30 (Storyteller's discretion).

• **Using Siege Engines [Intelligence + Leadership]:** Employing siege engines in battle requires slightly different skills than does a regular attack. The standard combat mechanism (pages 237–239 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*) applies, but rather than rolling Dexterity + Archery (the usual missile attack pool), the roll is Intelligence + Leadership. Most siege engines cannot use any ranged attack maneuvers. The exception is the counterweight trebuchet that may use the aim maneuver, using the main operator's Perception (and Leadership rather than Archery). Remember that no siege engine can target a moving object without supernatural aid.

• **Sapping [Intelligence + Leadership/ Strength + Crafts]:** Digging tunnels to undermine a fortification requires a combination of intelligence, cunning, strength and determination. The first stage in the operation is identifying a weakness and devising an appropriate plan. This requires an Intelligence + Leadership roll by the player acting as the general or chief sapper. The difficulty is 6 in normal conditions, rising to 7 or 8 where conditions are unfavorable (due to rocky ground, flooding, etc.). At least one success is needed to formulate a viable plan, though additional successes increase the likelihood of success. The main excavations require extended Strength + Crafts (mining) rolls (difficulty as above), one per week. The number of successes here determines the speed at which the mine progresses—50 yards per success per week in good conditions (packed earth), 25 yards per success in fair conditions, and 10 yards per success per week in poor conditions (solid rock). A botch at this stage results in the collapse of a section of

the mine. The distance from the mine entrance to the target is at the Storyteller's discretion. Assuming the mine is not foiled by the defenders (see countermine), roll a number of damage dice equal to Intelligence + Leadership plus one die per success at the planning stage. Each success inflicts three health levels of damage on the targeted fortification. Unlike direct attacks against the structures, damage from sapping cannot be soaked.

• **Countermine [Perception + Alertness/Strength + Crafts]:** Besieged forces are ever vigilant for sapping directed against them and may make a Perception + Alertness each day. The difficulty of this detection attempt is dependent on the distance to the mine — 2 for every 10 yards out from the walls (i.e., a mine that is currently 50 yards from the wall is difficulty 10 to detect while one 30 yards from the wall is difficulty 6 to spot). Countermines are dug according to the same rules as sapping above, rolling Strength + Crafts (mining). Countermines may be dug at twice the speed of normal mines providing the sappers ignore safety procedures such as shoring. The side effect of doing so is that even a simple failure will result in the collapse of a section of the tunnel.

## Naval Combat

Naval combat is unusual in that it requires a group of individuals to work as a team. The Attribute and Ability scores used in the actions may be those of an individual character — usually the captain but possibly a dedicated navigator or some such — or can be those of a team (such as those operating a siege engine) or the entire crew. For simplicity, the tasks below assume the crew members all have the same Traits, though players wishing more complexity may vary the crew's Traits and calculate the average (round fractions to the nearest whole) when dice rolls are needed.

• **Navigation [Intelligence + Seamanship]:** Most navigation in the Dark Medieval is done by dead reckoning, the sailors using a combination of prevailing winds, landmarks and other factors (e.g., following birds). Even the recent introduction of the magnetic compass (in the late 12th century in Europe, early in the 13th in Outremer) has done little to change this, though local knowledge of coastlines and hazards is being collected in pilot's books that will, in the next few decades, metamorphose into portolan or harbor-finding charts. If a vessel is within sight of land, the difficulty of the Navigation attempt is 6, though this increases to 9 if the sailor has no firm reference point and must instead rely on wind, current or bird observations. Possession of a compass reduces this difficulty by one<sup>1</sup>, as does possession of an appropriate pilot's book. The number of successes indicates the precision of the navigator's estimates, while no successes indicate that the navigator is lost. A botch

indicates that not only is the vessel lost, but that it may be sailing into danger oblivious of the perils.

• **Pursuit [Wits + Seamanship]:** While speed is the primary factor in pursuits, a canny captain can overcome his vessel's shortcomings, while an inexperienced one can squander his advantage. When involved in a pursuit, the Storyteller or player controlling each vessel should roll the captain's Wits + Seamanship once every four hours (difficulty 7), adding the number of successes to the speed of the vessel. The net difference in the resulting values determines whether the gap between vessels grows, shrinks or remains constant. Each point by which the pursuer's value exceeds the target's results in the range between the vessels decreasing by 500 yards, while each point in the target's favor increases the range by the same distance. Oared vessels may be rowed for a maximum of 12 hours per day, though they may boost their temporary oar speed by one point at the expense of three hours' endurance. Fleets usually travel at the speed of their slowest members, but laggardly members of either fleet may be left behind. Some supernatural powers — such as the Order of Hermes' Vires Pillar — may be able to give one vessel an advantage or a means of hindering the other.

*For example, if a player controlling a small cog rolls three successes, he adds them to the vessel's speed of 3 for a net total of 6. The rowed galley he is pursuing has a base speed of 4 with oars, and thus the player controlling the galley needs to roll at least two successes to maintain the gap. If that player rolls only one success, the cog draws 500 yards closer, despite its slower speed, whereas if she rolls three successes it pulls away from the cog by 500 yards.*

• **Maneuvering [Intelligence + Seamanship]:** Once vessels have closed to within a few hundred yards of each other, maneuver rather than outright speed becomes the major factor in their jockeying for position. The players (or Storyteller) controlling the captains should make resisted Intelligence + Seamanship rolls (difficulty 8 – the vessel's Maneuverability rating), the net successes determining the victor. Add these successes to the winner's initiative rating. If multiple vessels are involved, make a maneuvering roll for each vessel (or each squadron of ships in the case of fleet actions), adding half (round down) the number of successes to that vessel's initiative rating.

• **Boarding Actions:** Boarding actions are the most common form of naval combat, occurring when one vessel seeks to capture rather than sink another. Such actions may be roleplayed using the standard combat rules. Once half the defenders are neutralized, the remainder surrender if outnumbered by at least two to one, otherwise they continue to fight. If the crew surrenders, the boarders have free run of the ship, though some

defenders may still resist in cabins and the like. Individual warriors involved in boarding actions may — at the Storyteller's discretion — be required to make a Dexterity + Athletics roll (difficulty 6) to avoid being knocked overboard in the melee. If someone fails the roll, the character may make a second roll (difficulty 8) to catch the railing. A botch gives no such chance, indicating that he falls overboard, where he probably drowns, particularly if he is wearing armor.

- **Ship-to-Ship Combat [Dexterity + Archery]:**

Ship vs. ship combat uses the standard combat system, save that the initiative rolled for the vessel is that of its captain and the other dice are the average of the crew as outlined above. Each health level of damage to the vessel reduces its Speed and Maneuverability by one point. If a vessel's Speed is reduced to zero, it cannot move. If reduced below zero, the ship loses one health level from flooding every 15 minutes.

- **Repair [Perception + Seamanship/Crafts]:**

Most vessels carry a small number of parts to allow running repairs to keep the ship seaworthy, usually in the form of wooden braces (for larger ships) and canvas and tar hull patches. After battle damage or an accident, such materials may be needed to repair (or save!) a damaged vessel. Carrying out repairs is an extended action, the number of successes required to repair a health level of damage equal to the number of health levels of damage currently sustained by the ship. For example, if a dromon has taken six health levels of damage, repairing one level of damage requires six successes. Each repair attempt takes fifteen minutes and thus a lone repairman is unlikely to succeed (especially if the ship is flooding). Fortunately, up to six individuals may cooperate on a single repair effort, though each team may repair only a single health level per turn, no matter how many successes they achieve. To repair more than one health level in a turn (which may be required if the vessel is flooding) requires multiple repair teams.

## Large-scale Battles

Battles are a major feature of the Dark Medieval and characters may find themselves drawn into such conflicts whether they desire it or not. If the characters are to play a major role in the battle, they may use the system presented on pp. 65–69 of the *Dark Ages Storytellers Companion* (with some modifications for non-Cainite characters). While this places the characters at the heart of the action, it does not reflect the tactical aspects of combat. For those wishing to do so, an alternative mass battle system is presented here, placing more emphasis on leadership and planning than direct involvement in battle.

## Modifications to the Storyteller's Companion

The character-based mass combat in the *Storytellers Companion* focuses on Cainite characters, but other characters in the Dark Medieval can use it with a few modifications. These are:

- **Frenzy:** Much like Cainites, werewolves may fly into frenzy on the battlefield. Each turn, the werewolf's player must make a Rage roll. If the roll results in four or more successes, the werewolf enters frenzy (this is in contrast to vampires, who require successes on a Self-Control/Instinct roll not to frenzy). See p. 90 of *Dark Ages: Werewolf* for more details on Rage.

• **Use an Instant Discipline:** This stage incorporates any instant powers (Gifts, magic or Blessings). These may be “offensive,” such as the Obtenebration power Arms of Ahriman or a Garou’s Gnaw, or defensive, such as an Inquisitor’s Catechumen. Most magical Pillars can be used for offense or defense, but all spells used in combat are considered hurried castings (see p. 104 of *Dark Ages: Mage*).

• **Use an Extended Discipline:** This stage incorporates any extended-duration powers (Gifts, magic or Blessings), i.e., those that last more than a single combat round or require protracted concentration by the wielder. As with thaumaturgical rituals, Garou rites or Holy Art *ritae* may not be used in combat. Examples of “extended” powers include using the Al-Fatihah Pillar to coordinate troop actions, the Gift: Expel Spirit or Censure power of the Sedulitas Filius path (if used for more than a single turn).

• **Character Attacks:** Melee combat is handled identically for all major character types. Gifts, magic and Blessings that have lethal effects against the opposing unit affect the target in the same way as lethal Disciplines (i.e., one casualty per dot of that power used or the total dots in combination powers such as rotes). Where a power has no explicit rating, the Storyteller should adjudicate its effectiveness as she sees fit.

• **Counterattacks:** Only Cainites may be “staked” by 5+ successes. Other characters suffer damage normally at the rate of two damage dice per success. Powers that provide armor, such as the Transubstantiation of the Flesh Investiture, may increase a character’s soak rating.

• **Morale:** Cainites are not the only supernatural beings to provoke a strong reaction in unprepared mortal characters. The “supernatural killer” action applies to all characters who slay more than 10 en-

emies in a single turn. Additionally, a werewolf in a form other than Homid affects morale (difficulty 5 for Glabro or Lupus, 7 for Hispo). A Garou in Crinos form causes the Delirium in all susceptible units (see p. 96 of **Dark Ages: Werewolf**); most such troops break automatically. Units not affected by the Delirium automatically launch an Enhanced Counterattack against the werewolf. Gifts, magic and even Blessings may trigger “supernatural power” responses.

## Right of Command

This alternative mass combat system places emphasis on leadership and tactics rather than martial prowess. It is intended to reflect the structure and practices of conflicts in the Dark Medieval. Battles are fought over a number of Battle Turns, each of which represents an hour in the battle.

## Unit Formations and Strengths

The commander should divide his forces into four groups —Center, Left Wing, Right Wing and Reserve. The first three must contain troops. A commander is not obliged to create a reserve, though not doing so may have grave repercussions in battle. The types of troops allocated to each part of the army govern its abilities and vulnerabilities.

*For example, Marcus Verus, the Cainite Baron of Chester, readies a force comprising 2,000 peasants (2 units), 2,000 spearmen (2 units), 500 archers (1*

*unit), 300 light cavalry (3 units), 50 ghoul knights (1 unit) and 10 Cainite cavalry (1 unit). His army has the following statistics: Maneuver 19, Melee 20, Ranged 5, Defense 20.*

## Commanders

The overall commander and the commanders of each element of the battle can have a dramatic effect on the outcome of an engagement. At the start of each battle turn (lasting anywhere from 30 minutes to three hours; see the **Dark Ages Storytellers Companion**), the players controlling the two forces should make opposed Perception + Leadership rolls (difficulty 6) to represent the army commanders. Likewise, the same rolls should be made for each of the forward elements of the army (the wings and center). Apply the net successes of these rolls to all the appropriate units — the result of the army roll to all three sub-elements, and the sub-element rolls to those specific forces. A botch on any of these rolls gives the opponent two additional net successes.

*For example, if an army command roll achieved three successes while the enemy had four, all elements of the army would suffer a -1 dice penalty (while the opposition would gain a die). However, if a sub-element roll achieved three successes and the roll for the enemy element botched, the net successes would be five (three for his successes, plus two because the opponent botched), which would both cancel out the -1 and give each pool of that element three additional dice.*

## TROOP TYPES

Total the number of troops of each type in the section of the army to determine the dice pools used for appropriate actions.

Unit type	Quantity of troops	Maneuver Dice	Attack Dice (melee)	Attack Dice (Ranged)	Defense Dice
Peasants	1000	1	1	1	1
Swordsmen	1000	1	2	0	2
Spearmen	1000	1	2	0	3
Archers	500	1	1	2	1
Crossbowmen	500	1	1	2	1
Skirmishers	500	2	1	2	1
Light Cavalry	100	3	2	0	2
Heavy Cavalry	100	2	3	0	3
Horse Archers	100	2	2	3	2
Siege Engine	10	0	0	5	1
Cainite Cavalry	10	3	4	1	3
Cainite Skirmishers	10	2	3	1	3
Ghoul Knights	50	2	3	0	2
Kinfolk Wolves	10	4	2	0	2
Garou Pack	5	3	5	1	3
Knights of Acre	25	2	3	1	4

## NO MAGES?

Stute readers will note that no provision is made on the Troop Types table for beings capable of casting magic (or magic-like effects), including mages of all stripes, Cainite blood sorcerers, Red Order inquisitors and so on. The reason for this is that magic is nearly impossible to simulate with a few quick rolls, and to attempt to do so would cheapen its effect anyway. A spellcaster or theurgist fighting in an army is most assuredly going to have an effect on the battle's outcome, but how that plays out in terms of this battle system is left to the Storyteller to adjudicate, based on what game she is running and what role she wants magic to play in her chronicle.

## The Battle

In a battle, resolve the actions of each element of the army independently, though circumstances may allow the separate elements of the army to work together against an opponent. In a battle turn each element of the army may take one action from the list below, rolling dice as appropriate. The player(s) controlling each side should write down the orders for its elements, which are then revealed simultaneously. The actions of both sides are considered simultaneous and damage takes effect after both sides have resolved their actions.

- **Make melee attack:** The player makes a resisted roll for the unit, pitting its *melee* pool vs. the defenders *defense* pool. If the attacking unit has more successes than the defender, each success eliminates one enemy unit of the defender's choice. If the defender has more successes than the attacker, the attacker must lose one unit per net success. If both sides have the same number of successes, neither force loses troops.

- **Make ranged attack:** The player makes a resisted roll for the unit, pitting its *ranged* pool vs. half the defender's *defense* pool. If the attacking unit has more successes than the defender, each success eliminates one enemy unit of the defender's choice. If the defender has more successes or the result is a tie, neither side takes losses.

- **Make flanking attack:** Each of the wings (not the center) may attempt to make a flanking attack on the opponent. The players make resisted rolls with the *maneuver* pools of the unit and its opposite number. If the attacker wins, the defender must eliminate *two* units per net success. If the attacker loses the roll, his force must lose units, albeit only one unit per net success. Such units must be cavalry units where they

are available. Flanking attacks may not be made if the defender has "secured its flanks" (see Terrain).

- **Withdraw:** An element of an army may attempt to distance itself from its opponents, avoiding or postponing its conflict with the enemy. Make a resisted *maneuver* roll and if the unit attempting to withdraw achieves more successes than its opponents, it backs away from the enemy and cannot be targeted with melee or flanking attacks in the current round. This is an exception to the usual simultaneity of action. If the unit fails in its attempt to withdraw, apply the net successes gained by the opponent in the withdrawal attempt as a penalty to the unit's defense and maneuver pools for the remainder of the turn. If all three elements of an army make successful withdrawal attempts in the same turn, the battle ends.

## Morale

Keep track of the total number of units lost by the elements of an army. If the total is greater than the sum of the commander's Charisma + Leadership dice pool, that element of the army is *demoralized* and suffers a -1 die penalty to each pool for each point in excess of the commander's dice pool. This penalty may not reduce the dice in a pool below one. For example, if the right wing of an army has lost eight units when its commander has a Charisma + Leadership pool of six dice that element of the army suffers a -2 penalty to each of its dice pools.

Sudden, catastrophic losses can also have a profound effect on the elements of an army. At the end of each turn in which an element loses units, its commander should roll Charisma + Leadership. The difficulty of this roll is the number of units lost by the element that turn (no roll is necessary unless the army loses three or more units in a single turn). If the roll succeeds, the element suffers no ill effects, but if the result is a failure, the unit wavers and suffers a -2 dice penalty on all pools in the next turn. As with demoralization, this modifier may not reduce the number of dice in a pool below one. If the result is a botch, the element breaks and flees the field.

## Turning Flanks

If all the units in an element of an army are destroyed — or if that element breaks — the army is at a great disadvantage with enemies either separating its elements from each other (if it is the center that has gone) or being enveloped by the enemy (in the case of a wing being eliminated). In such cases, the opposing unit that no longer faces enemy troops may turn its attentions to the adjacent units (one of the wings in the case of a center, or the center in the case of wings). Such units add 1.5 x their dice pools to any actions. If a force with such an advantage takes damage, the losses should be spread

as evenly as possible between the main element (that naturally fighting the opponent) and any supplementary elements (those adding their pools to the attack as a result of having no opposition).

## The Reserves

Units cannot move between the three front-line elements of an army (i.e., the wings and the center). They may, however, move from the reserve to one of the three main elements (but not from front-line elements to the reserve) at the start of a turn. A wise commander thus leaves a number of troops in his reserve to shore up a struggling element or to increase its effectiveness of an element to exploit an enemy's weakness.

## Complications

Numerous factors can influence the outcome of a battle, most notably terrain, weather and fortifications. The following table notes the impact of different terrain and environmental conditions on an element's dice pools, the values adding or subtracting to an element's pools depending on its circumstances. Such modifiers may not reduce a pool below one die.

## Ending the Battle

A battle ends when one side has been eliminated, broken or withdrawn from the field, or when eight

battle turns have been fought. In most cases, the winner of a battle is the side whose forces remain in possession of the battlefield at the end of the day, though this is not always the case. Instead, a force may claim victory if it resists the enemy for a set period of time before being beaten, or for eliminating a specific unit in the enemy army. Victory is what the combatants make of it. Indeed, it is quite possible for both sides in an engagement to claim victory as a result of differing but not exclusive conditions (e.g., one might seek to destroy the opposition, while the other seeks to prevent the enemy advance for several hours).

## An Example of play

Marcus Verus, the Cainite Baron of Chester, assembles a force of mortal and Cainite vassals with which he plans to eliminate a pack of Lupines who have recently caused trouble in the Baron's holdings. Marcus' force comprises 2,000 peasants, 2,000 spearmen, 500 archers, 300 light cavalry, 50 ghoul knights and 10 Cainite cavalry. He arranges his forces so that the Left and Right Wings each contains 1,000 spearmen and 100 light cavalry (combined dice pools of Maneuver 4, Melee 4, Ranged 0, Defense 5), the Center 2,000 peasants, 100 light cavalry and 500 archers (Maneuver 6, Melee 5, Ranged 4, Defense 5). His reserve comprises 10 Cainite and 50 ghoul knights (Maneuver 5, Melee 7, Ranged 1, Defense 5).

### COMPLICATIONS

Conditions	Maneuver	Melee	Ranged	Defense
Wooded	-1	-1	-3	0
Marsh	-3	-2	0	-1
Rocky	-2	-1	0	+1
Attacking uphill	-1	-1	0	-1
Attacking downhill	+1	0	+1	+1
Attacking across ditch	-2	0	0	+1
Attacking across stream	-1	0	0	+1
Attacking past stakes	-2	0	0	0
Attacking Palisade	-2	-2	0	0
Attacking small wall	-2	-2	-1	0
Attacking large wall	-2	-2	-1	0
Defending Palisade	-4	-2	0	+1
Defending small wall	-4	-2	+1	+2
Defending large wall	-4	-2	+1	+3
Light rain	0	-1	-2	0
Heavy rain	-1	-2	-4	0
Snow	-2	-2	-2	0

- Securing flanks:** A wing element may prevent an opponent from making a flank attack by positioning itself so that it is adjacent to "impassable" terrain such as a marsh, forest, river or lake. If it is able to do so (at the Storyteller's discretion), that element may not be flanked.



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His opponents, the Garou of the Black Salt Sept, marshal their forces to oppose the Vampire horde. They assemble 2,000 peasants, 1,000 skirmishers and 1,000 archers, as well as 100 light cavalry, three packs of Kinfolk Wolves and one of Garou. Their commander, Rhodry Ironfur, places the peasants in the Center, supported by his cavalry (for dice pools of Maneuver 5, Melee 4, Ranged 2, Defense 4), and combined forces of 500 archers and 500 skirmishers on each of the Right and Left Wings, supported by 10 wolves each (Maneuver 7, Melee 4, Ranged 4, Defense 4). This third wolf pack and the Garou form his reserve (Maneuver 7, Melee 7, Ranged 1, Defense 5).

The battle takes place in a valley and the Garou choose their defensive position carefully. Marcus' forces must attack uphill in each location and units in the center must also attack across a stream. Furthermore, a steep slope secures the Garou army's Left Wing, preventing it from being flanked.

The players make Perception + Leadership rolls for the army commanders — six dice for Rhodry and seven for Marcus, each gaining three successes: no advantage. The players also roll for the element commanders — Cassius and Llewellyn on the Left Wing (five and six dice for three and two successes respectively, a +1 advantage to the Cainites), Roger and Bites-Quick in

the Center (five dice each, three successes each for no advantage) and Raimond and Morgan on the Right Wing (four and five dice for three and one successes respectively, a surprising +2 advantage to the Cainites).

The players decide their orders and secretly write them down to be revealed simultaneously. The Cainite Left and Right Wings will engage in melee attacks, while the center will use its ranged attack. The Garou opt to use ranged attacks on the Left Wing, melee in the Center and a flanking attack on the Right Wing.

The Cainite Left Wing has a melee of 4. The commander's result increases this to 5, while the attacking uphill penalty reduces it back to 4. The Garou defenses of 4 gain +1 for being uphill but also suffer a -1 penalty for the commander's roll, a net result of 4. The Cainites achieve three successes and the Garou only two. The Garou must lose a unit and choose the skirmishers, who are destroyed at the end of the turn. First, however, the Garou make their missile attack — four dice vs. the Cainites' five defense dice. The result of the commander's roll nullifies the Garou's +1 missile advantage for attacking downhill and also the Cainite's -1 defensive penalty for attacking uphill. The Garou achieve success, but the Cainites have two: no loss.

In the Center, the commanders' rolls were tied and so neither side has a leadership advantage. The Cainite missile attack (four dice) suffers no modification for the terrain, but the defending Garou receive two extra defensive dice for being uphill and across a stream (for a total of six dice). The Cainites achieve two successes and the Garou three. The Garou suffer no loss. Their own action — a melee attack — uses four dice, unmodified by the terrain, against the Cainites' five defensive dice. The werewolves manage two successes, but the Cainites achieve three. As this is melee, the Garou must lose a unit and select one of their peasant forces.

On the Right Wing, the Cainites have a decisive leadership advantage but are also exposed to the Garou's maneuverability. The Cainite melee attack pits their five dice (increased from four to six by the leadership but reduced to five by attacking uphill) against three defensive dice (decreased from four to two by the leadership but bolstered for being uphill). Stunningly, the Cainites achieve five successes and the Garou three. The werewolves must lose two units and select the archers and skirmishers. Nonetheless, they may attempt their flanking attack, pitting their six maneuver dice (seven, reduced to five by leadership, increased by one for attacking downhill) against the Cainite's five dice (four, increased to six by leadership, reduced by one for attacking uphill). The Garou achieve three successes and the Cainites two. As this is the flanking attack, the Garou's one net success means the Cainites must lose both units in the Right Wing.

The battle continues.

## Personal Combat

Storytellers may desire a personal combat system more detailed than the one in *Dark Ages: Vampire*. These mechanics are an optional modification to those in that book. They assume the Storyteller and players are familiar with the rules on pp. 237–253.

Weapons fall into four types — bashing, smashing, hacking and piercing — depending on the form of damage they inflict. Bashing damage is described on pp. 252–253 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*. Smashing, hacking and piercing damage are all types of lethal damage (see p. 253 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*). The only difference is how armor interacts with that type of damage.

Bashing (B) damage is damage that can be swiftly healed like bruises, sprains, and minor cuts. Fists and improvised weapons such as chairs and light clubs inflict bashing damage. Smashing (LS) damage is

caused by heavier blunt weapons such as maces, cudgels, hammers and staffs. The weapons that inflict smashing damage are often heavy and slow. Rigid metal armor such as coats of plates and plate armor is most effective at resisting it.

Hacking (LH) damage involves chopping edges like swords and axes. The damage is partly smashing injuries to skin and bones, and partly sharp edges designed to cut flesh. This is the most common type of lethal damage. Rigid and soft metal armor such as chain mail, coats of plates and plate armor are the best defense against hacking damage. Piercing (LP) damage results when a great deal of force is applied over a small point or surface such as an arrow, crossbow bolt, spear or atypical kinds of polearms. It is equally effective against all armor types.

## Atypical Equipment

Armor and weapons go together in a constant arms race. Those with supernatural powers face foes for whom the typical chain mail, shield and broad sword combination may be almost useless. Such characters might, with sufficient resources, skill and cleverness, invent weapons that will not otherwise be seen in Europe until decades or centuries later. A Storyteller should be cautious in allowing anachronistic weapons and armor, however. Many require a combination of training, metallurgy, quality ore, armory skill and knowledge that just should not be available to most people in 1230. Such advances should be limited to characters who work hard at becoming the supernatural Leonardo Da Vincis of their day.

Brigandine armor, a type of mixed cloth and metal armor, does not appear until the late 14th century. This is a "coat of plates" where a cloth coat is lined with rectangular metal plates. Rivets holding the plates show on the exterior of the armor. The resulting armor weighs only about 19 pounds, but it is very awkward. (A hauberk of chain mail weighs 20–34 pounds. A set of *chausses*, mail leggings, weighs another 7 to 10 pounds.) This could be managed with mid-13th-century metallurgy but would be very unusual. A vampire or ghoul might need this extra armor against other vampires or against lupines who can easily shred chain mail.

Plate armor does not appear until the early 14th century. In 1230, the metallurgy and armory skills just aren't good enough to manage it. That is not to say that a mage could not invent it, but it would be obviously out of place and would attract comment. Heavier armor (50–65 pounds for full field plate) also means breeding a stronger warhorse (or using a ghoul

or magically enhanced warhorse) to carry the plate-armored knight into battle.

Fourteenth-century crossbow archers used large wooden shields call *pavises*, which were about three feet wide and four feet or more tall, to protect themselves from hostile arrow fire while reloading — especially from higher-power crossbows and the English longbow. Someone who frequently encountered lots of ranged attacks might invent and carry such a shield, but it would be unusual.

A character who frequently encounters foes that have the equivalent of plate armor may have a custom-designed sword which is intended more for cutting and impaling than for cutting and shearing, as the typical mid-13th century sword is. Such a sword would have an obviously different outline, with a diamond-shaped cross-section, marked taper and sharp point. This would excite comment and questions among any experienced soldier or knight who saw it. If this sword is combined with sufficient armor (or used by a character whose supernatural defenses are strong enough that a shield is not needed), the sword may be designed for two-handed use.

The two-handed great sword is exceptional in the mid-13th century. It evolves later when plate armor makes a shield less necessary. It might be invented and carried by creatures with exceptional strength and strong defenses who do not rely on armor, such as werewolves.

The war hammer is a 14th-century descendent of the mace, designed for use against plate armor. It is usually about two feet long, designed for both one-handed and two-handed use.

The morning star (as a ball-and-chain type of flail) is extremely rare and does not appear before the 15th century. The weapon is difficult to control and less powerful than simply putting the head on a shaft as long as the total shaft and chain. An agricultural flail (two long wooden staffs connected to each other by a pair of rings) can be used as a weapon, but it is usually not seen on the battlefield until the 15th century.

The spear and protopike (poleax: see *Dark Ages: Vampire* p. 248) are the standard polearms of the mid-13th century. A character who frequently encounters foes that have the equivalent of plate armor may invent specialized polearms that mimic 14th- and 15th-century weapons such as the halberd and bill. These weapons combine a sharp axe edge with a hook that could be used to pull an enemy off his horse or hook his shield. These weapons are five to six feet long and impossible to conceal, and will attract comment from anyone who sees them.

The English longbow famed at Crecy and Agincourt is currently known only in Wales. Unlike

## PHYSIOLOGICAL DIFFERENCES

**W**hile the way a weapon works does not differ depending on the target, differences in the way the victim's body works means that not all forms of attack are equally effective. The rules presented here assume the target is a normal mortal. Other character types are affected as follows:

**Mortals:** Mortals (including inquisitors and mages) take full damage from an attack. They may soak bashing damage with their Stamina + any armor but must rely on armor (and magical protections) against any form of lethal damage.

**Werewolves:** Garou suffer damage from all forms of attack but unlike mortals may use their Stamina to soak bashing and lethal damage. They may also soak aggravated damage in any form except Homid. Damage from silver weapons may be soaked only by homid and lupus werewolves in breed form; any unsoaked damage is considered lethal. They may also regenerate bashing and lethal damage extremely quickly. See p. 102 of *Dark Ages: Werewolf* for complete information.

**Vampires:** Suffer half damage from bashing and piercing attacks, though the latter — if with an appropriate weapon such as a stake or arrow — may paralyze the vampire (see pp. 246–247 and 254 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*). Cainites may use Stamina + Fortitude + armor to soak any bashing or lethal damage but use Fortitude alone against aggravated wounds. They may burn blood to heal damage (see pp. 162–163 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*).

the longbow mentioned in *Dark Ages: Vampire*, which is drawn only to the chest, the Welsh longbow is longer and drawn to the ear, giving it greater range (150 yards). It is a very powerful weapon, but one that would almost never be found in any great numbers on a mid-13th-century battlefield.

Mages and inventors might be able to improve the standard crossbow with more powerful springs and strings. A supernaturally strong character might be able to draw the bow using a boot-and-stirrup method. Mere mortals would have to use a windlass or geared rack, or hook the string and a pulley to the archer's belt so he could draw with his body.

Some of the combat effects of these anachronistic weapons are up the Storyteller. Custom-made equipment created or enhanced by magic or supernatural means will likely bear little resemblance to their historical counterparts.

# Typical Weapons

These are the most common weapons found on a battlefield in the Dark Medieval. In many cases, damage amounts have been reduced from *Dark Ages: Vampire* to balance the changes to armor and to reflect the relatively low historic mortality rate among armored combatants.

## Peasant Weapons

**Bow, Short (4 LP):** A standard three- to four-foot bow used primarily for hunting. Most knights are familiar with the bow, but it is not generally considered a knightly weapon for war. Range 60 yards.

**Bow, Long (6 LP):** The larger cousin of the short bow (six feet long) and drawn to the chest. Minimum Strength 3; range 120 yards.

**Bow, Long, Welsh (7 LP):** A stronger version of the long bow drawn to the ear. In 1230, this version of the long bow is unknown outside of Wales (although the Mongols have developed a shorter version that can be fired from horseback). In later centuries it will be widely adopted by the English army, much to the dismay of the French. Minimum Strength 4; range 150 yards.

**Club (Strength +1B):** Any sort of improvised blunt instrument ranging from a board to a chair, to a tree branch. Weapons that are awkwardly sized or shaped (big branches, etc.) may be difficulty 7 to use.

**Crossbow, Light (4 LP):** A simple crossbow that can be cocked by hand. Range 120 yards.

**Crossbow (6 LP):** The common version of the crossbow, which generally has a stirrup so that it can be cocked using the full strength of the archer's back. Range 100 yards.

**Cudgel (Strength +1 LS):** A compact blunt instrument such as a trimmed branch or axe handle that is solid enough to transmit the force of the attack without breaking.

**Hatchet (Strength +1 LH):** A wood cutter's one-handed small axe.

**Knife (Strength +1 LP):** A typical craft or eating knife, generally single-edged with a blade no longer than the owner's palm.

**Pitchfork (Strength +2LP):** A common two-handed agricultural tool with a wood handle and wood tines. A wealthy peasant may be able to reinforce the tines with metal tips.

**Sling (3B):** An uncommon peasant's weapon. Range 50 yards.

**Spear (one-handed) (Strength + 3 LP):** A common foot soldier's weapon, generally used by ranks of

massed levies. The spear is unwieldy — +1 difficulty unless the character has a specialty in its use.

**Spear (two-handed) (Strength +3 LP):** A common foot soldier's weapon, generally used by ranks of massed levies.

**Staff-sling (4B):** An uncommon peasant's weapon. Range 75 yards. Can be loaded with lime powder as an irritant or with oil as an incendiary.

## Knight's Weapons

**Broadsword (Strength +3 LH):** The archetypical weapon of the Middle Ages. It is a three-foot sword with a blunt tip used to hack at an opponent.

**Common Mace (Strength +1 LS):** A wooden cudgel with iron studs on the end. Maces are not common on the medieval battlefield.

**Hand Ax (Strength +2 LH):** A large one-handed ax often based on Viking or Scandinavian designs. Axes are not common on the medieval battlefield.

**Lance (8 or Strength LP):** A long, heavy spear used as a common cavalry weapon. The second figure is if the lance is used for a Lance Thrust (see p. 246 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*). Lances are extremely uncommon as battlefield weapons.

**Lance, Light (6 or Strength LP):** As described in *Dark Ages: Vampire*, a light, usually hollow lance primarily used by the Saracens. The second figure is if the lance is used for a Lance Thrust (see p. 246 of *Dark Ages: Vampire*). Lances are extremely uncommon as battlefield weapons.

**Lance, Compound (9 or Strength LP):** A very heavy, long version of the lance used by the Saracens.

**Mace (Strength +2 LP):** A wooden cudgel with an iron head with metal vanes or flanges. The vanes will bend or break on a botch, reducing the weapon to a smashing weapon. Maces are not common on the medieval battlefield.

**Scimitar (Strength +3 LH):** The light, curved Saracen sword.

## Atypical Weapons

As explained above, characters who frequently encounter the supernatural may invent or modify common weapons into items which are more effective against their foes' specific powers than common medieval weapons. Most two-handed weapons are atypical until plate armor evolves to give a knight the same kind of protection that a chain hauberk and shield gave his ancestors.

**Bastard Sword (Strength +4 LH):** A four-foot "hand-and-a-half" version of the broadsword that was

invented during the transition from chain armor to plate armor.

**Battle Ax (Strength +5 LH):** A two-handed ax primarily used by Scandinavian fighters.

**Crossbow, Heavy (7 LP):** A complex version of the crossbow that is cocked using a windlass and gears. Range 150 yards

**Dagger (Strength +1 LP):** A slightly longer version of the knife designed for use in combat. It is primarily used for killing incapacitated foes. Daggers are uncommon battlefield weapons before the 14th century.

**Estoc (Strength +3 LH/+2 LP):** A 14th-century version of the broadsword designed for both hacking and thrusting. The blade has a reinforced diamond-cross section to prevent it from breaking when thrust at a foe.

**Great Sword (Strength +5LH):** A four- to six-foot-long two-handed sword designed for use against plate-armored foes. It is unwieldy — +1 difficulty unless the character has a specialty in its use.

**Morning Star (Strength +3 LS):** A handle and metal ball on a chain. It does not appear until the 15th century and is uncommon even then. Its difficulty is +1 and it may strike the user on a botch. On the other hand, it is harder to parry with a weapon (parry difficulty +1), but not with a shield.

**Pole-ax (Strength +5 LH/+5 LS):** The predecessor to the halberd and a cousin to the war-ax. This weapon has an ax head, a flat hammerlike head and a pick. Depending on which head is used, the weapon can be either hacking or smashing. It is unwieldy, Diff +1.

**Warhammer (Strength +5 LS):** A 14th-century descendant of the mace designed for use against plate armor. It has a heavy head on a long pole and a point or beak for piercing plate armor.

## Typical Armor

The armor of 1230 ranges from padded cloth to a chain hauberk with chausses (leggings) and with plate reinforcement for the long bones. Plate armor is still in the future. Note that the effectiveness of armor to prevent injury varies depending on the nature of the damage. Roll armor-provided soak dice separately from those provided by Stamina (and other innate sources such as Fortitude).

**Light Armor:** This armor includes soft leather, hardened boiled leather (*cuir bouilli*) and the quilted or

padded cloth worn under chain mail when worn alone. Light armor is resistant to bashing attacks (soak difficulty 6) but provides less protection to hacking and piercing attacks (soak difficulty 7). It soaks +1B/+2L.

**Composite Armor:** This slightly heavier armor comprises leather reinforced with metal rings and/or studs, or perhaps light chain mail. Composite armor is resistant to hacking attacks (soak difficulty 6 for bashing and hacking) but still provides little protection against smashing and piercing attacks (soak difficulty 7). It soaks +2B/+3L.

**Heavy Armor:** Heavy armor comprises metal, usually ring or chain mail, over a layer of quilted padding. This is the standard chain hauberk. It provides good protection against bashing and hacking attacks (soak difficulty 5) but remains vulnerable to smashing and piercing attacks (soak difficulty 6). It soaks +3B/+4L.

**Knight's Armor:** This is the most advanced armor in 1230, including a chain hauberk, separate chain leggings and metal leg-guards. It provides some protection against smashing attacks and foreshadows plate armor. Its soak difficulty is 5 vs. bashing, hacking and smashing and 6 against piercing. It soaks +4B/+4L.

## Atypical Armor

It would be extremely difficult for even a mage to create true plate-armor in 1230. The metal ores, blacksmithing and armory skills are all insufficient to create these intricate works of interlocking metal. If a character is somehow able to create plate armor, however, the solid curved surfaces provide excellent protection against bashing, hacking and smashing attacks (soak difficulty 4). It is still vulnerable to piercing attacks (soak difficulty 5). It soaks +5B/+5L.

## Shields

Shields are unchanged from p. 249 of **Dark Ages: Vampire**. A character who frequently faces large amounts of arrow fire might invent the tower shield, which appears in Europe as a counter to the Welsh long bow. The tower shield is full-body protection. Its size makes the tower shield an excellent defense against missiles (raise the difficulty to hit someone protected by one by 4) but provides only a +1 bonus against melee attacks. It is heavy and unwieldy and cannot normally be used to parry.



# CHAPTER TWO: POISONED QUILLS

“It is preferable to subdue an enemy by famine, raids and terror, than in battle, where fortune tends to have more influence than bravery.”

— Flavius Vegetius Renatus, *The Military Institutions of the Romans*

Of course, the vast majority of the inhabitants of the Dark Medieval — even among the illustrious ranks of player’s characters — have neither the ability nor the authority to raise armies against their adversaries. This requires far more than personal power, which many vampires, werewolves and mages possess in abundance. Raising an army requires substantial local authority, to say nothing of enormous amounts of money, or at least the support of someone with those resources.

Assuming one is capable of raising an army — and not just any army, but one with weaponry and manpower equal or greater to that of one’s adversary — the simple truth is that armed invasion is never subtle. As soon as a character sounds the call to arms, well before he’s sent even a single soldier into enemy territory, he’s thrown away any chance of accomplishing his objective without drawing attention. The opponent, should he learn of the plan, may launch a preemptive attack, determined to destroy the enemy’s ability to make war before he ever becomes a real threat. Doing so is difficult, however, because the opponent faces the same troubles in raising an army that the character does. At the very least, one’s own preparations buy the foe time to bolster his defenses. If an invasion fails, not only does the enemy know who attacked him, but others are likely to hear of a character’s defeat and reason that his own territories are now poorly



## TURNABOUT IS FAIR PLAY

Certainly the techniques presented in this chapter will see most of their use in the hands of players, who are no doubt already rubbing their hands in glee at the notion of stripping lands and resources from their Storyteller-run rivals without having to engage in bloody war. This is certainly a reasonable use for the material, and Storytellers are encouraged to let their players have fun with the new toys presented herein.

At the same time, Storytellers are equally encouraged to bear in mind the fact that their own characters, particularly those who already have the power the players seek, almost certainly know most of these tricks and should be willing to use them in turn. Let the characters occasionally find themselves the target of a hired assassin, the subject of a concerted effort to destroy their names and reputations or even the proud landholders of an estate that has become suddenly and mysteriously plague-ridden. This can easily be overdone; this sort of attack on the characters should be an occasional event at best, not the sort of threat they face on a nightly basis. Still, it's important to remember than nothing is inherently unfair about using these techniques against the characters with the same frequency (and undisguised relish) that they use them on their own rivals.

defended and ripe for the taking. Even should such an invasion succeed, if the enemy does not fall with his soldiers, he will certainly seek retribution.

Still, many would-be conquerors are so entranced by glorious visions of riding at the vanguard of some great army that it never occurs to them that other methods of conquest are not only available but oftentimes preferable to military action. For those without the ability to raise an army to attack their rivals (or defend themselves), or for those who prefer, as do many denizens of the Dark Medieval, to remain cloaked in the shadows and nameless to their foes, plenty of options are simpler, easier and far more subtle than open war.

## Assassination

It is often said, usually in haughty, condescending or horrified tones, that assassination is nothing but the tool of cowards and weaklings. Only the lowest of the low could possibly stoop so far as to hire others to perform murder in the shadows rather than face their adversaries openly.

Of course, most who speak thus never had to work for their positions of power, have the advantage of a

Along those same lines, one additional headache Storytellers may have to deal with is the player who turns these techniques on the other characters. If you're running a chronicle in which intracharacter rivalries are encouraged (or at least tolerated), this is perfectly acceptable. Many players and Storytellers prefer an environment of cooperation between characters, however. The techniques provided here are subtle, secret — and often untraceable in-character, meaning that even though a player may know that her fellow gamer was responsible for the recent supply problems in her territory, her character has no way of knowing who is at fault. This can lead, if left unchecked, to frustration and even ill will between players, all to the detriment of the chronicle and everyone's enjoyment of the game.

With as light a touch as possible, the Storyteller should make it clear when this material is first introduced whether or not, and to what degree, he considers it acceptable for use against other player characters. A preemptive discussion should head off most such problems before they arise. If they don't, it shouldn't be too hard for the Storyteller to arrange for the perpetrator's name to "accidentally" fall into the victim's hands, at which point he may simply allow the rest of the group to deal with the offending character.

sizable army supporting them or else denounce such practices primarily to distract others from their own assassins. Those inhabitants of the Dark Medieval who seek to tear down their rivals or to protect what's theirs without the sound and fury of open war know full well that the careful and precise elimination of specific targets is not merely an acceptable practice but is often the single most effective means of crippling the enemy.

## A Public Demise

Most people, even the wisest of tacticians, tend to think of assassination as a secret, private thing. Because murder is something best performed in the dark, it never occurs to them that, at times, a public killing is better suited to their needs. When the motive behind an assassination is to send a message or to stir up public disorder (see below), one might very well want that assassination performed in front of witnesses, where it will have the most impact. This technique is most frequently employed against the leaders or figureheads of various movements or organizations. Because he and his followers pose a threat to the childer of the torpid Tzimisce Prince Razkoljna,

the Brujah Yitzhak ben Avraham, an Ashen Rabbi in Krakow, Poland, has had no fewer than three public assassination attempts on his unlife. His enemies hope that his Final Death before the eyes of his followers will frighten them away from continuing his work once he's gone.

Of course, slaying a popular figure in public is as likely to birth a martyr as to destroy an organization, but a large number of powerful individuals are willing to take that chance.

Not every public killing is directed at someone openly involved with such a movement. During the sporadic conflict that has flared in Greece between a cabal of Old Faith witches and inquisitors from across the channel in Italy, the mage Kristatos made ruthless use of this technique in the town of Arta by ordering an Orthodox priest slaughtered in front of his own congregation. A group of inquisitors had but recently arrived in search of Kristatos and his companions. The execution of the priest was meant both as a message to the inquisitors and to turn the townsfolk against them; they were, after all, the only newcomers to arrive in the days preceding the murder of their beloved Father. Kristatos got his message across in a way that a quiet, secretive operation could not.

## Uses of Assassination

While an enormous number of assassinations are politically motivated, the truth is that nearly as many reasons exist for assassination as methods of doing so. It's always possible, of course, for a rich or powerful individual to have a rival assassinated for purely personal reasons. Here, however, we focus primarily on those motivations that have more concrete benefits in a character's quest for power.

### Removing or Disrupting the Opposition

Perhaps the most obvious and the most common purpose behind assassination, the objective here is to remove a particular rival from the field, either an actual battlefield or a political one. In many cases, the individual responsible for arranging the assassination considers the target her only true enemy and believes that anyone who might step forward to replace him will most certainly lack the target's ability to harm her. During the Ventru Jürgen the Swordbearer's attempted invasion of Eastern Europe and the Tzimisce territories, he and voivode Vladimir Rustovitch attempted to assassinate one another on numerous occasions. Jürgen firmly believed that the Tzimisce resistance, fractionalized and disorganized as it was, would disintegrate without the voivode of voivodes to

hold it together. Rustovitch was equally convinced that the invasion, which was really little more than Jürgen's pet project, would falter and slow — if not disappear outright — without the charismatic German Ventru. Whether either analysis was accurate remains unknown, since neither Cainite succeeded in having the other slain and the invasion eventually failed due to other factors, but this still suggests the impact the death of a single individual can have on a large-scale conflict.

It is, at best, a tendency rather than an iron-clad rule, but it's worth noting that this approach tends to work better for the defender in a given conflict than it does for the aggressor. Often, if a territory under assault can manage the assassination of the attacker's lord, the invasion — propelled by its leader's hunger for power and charisma — falls apart. Should the aggressors assassinate the leader of the besieged region, however, the result is often the creation of a martyr, and a hundred men rising up to take the place of the fallen. Again, this is by no means universal. When the Tremere assaulted and ultimately destroyed the Miskolc chantry during the Massasa War, it was the death of their leader Jenica Bogdana that crushed the local mages' will to fight. Still, more often than not, it is the defenders who benefit most from the use of assassination, primarily because the defenders have more personally at stake if they should fail.

Of course, assassination of an enemy lord need not wait until two sides are already in conflict. The death of an ambitious leader can often forestall a greater clash before it starts. By removing the voice that most loudly calls for war, one may well remove the impetus for that war — to say nothing of the likelihood that the next leader to step forward to take the dead one's place may well be too frightened for her own life to follow in her predecessor's footsteps. Again, the risk remains that by assassinating a warmongering lord, one may turn him into a martyr, making his name a rallying cry for others who feel as he did, but it's a chance many are willing to take.

The Black Mountain pack, a vast extended family of Shadow Lord werewolves with substantial territories hidden among and between Cainite factions in the Carpathian Mountain region, has developed preemptive assassination into a veritable art form. Through a combination of spiritual agents and paid spies, the Black Mountain listens for any signs that a rival — local vampire lord, outside tribe or even a competing pack among the Shadow Lords — is suggesting even the slightest move into their territory. Not long after such a course of action is first proposed, the leader in question is found brutally murdered. The Black Mountain never leaves direct evidence that they were responsible, but



## A BLOW TO MORALE

Sometimes the victim of an assassination isn't actually the assassin's true target. The death of a ruler, military commander or other public figure, particularly if the death is particularly brutal, can have a crushing affect on the enemy's morale. When they realize that the man they were fighting for is dead, and that not even their lord was safe from reprisal, many conscripted peasants — the core of any army — desert. Even those who continue to fight are disheartened, their efforts desultory because they feel the situation hopeless.

The denizens of the Dark Medieval have multiple techniques for making an assassination as horrible as possible, for maximum impact on morale. Mages can arrange a variety of hideous accidents. Inquisitors are often experienced with the infliction of unpleasant death. Cainites, however, have the ultimate threat for use when dealing with their own.

Diablerie, the consumption of a fellow vampire's soul, is considered by most to be the most hideous crime imaginable. Only under very select circumstances — certain varieties of duels, for instance, and in the eyes of a few Cainite organizations or factions such as the *Amici Noctis*, the ruling council of Clan Lasombra — is diablerie even marginally acceptable. Its use in assassinations or on the battlefield is practically inconceivable, which makes it a perfect intimidation tactic for those depraved enough to engage in it. This is especially popular among scattered packs of neonates rebelling against the rule of their elders. The mere rumor of a pack of diabolists is sufficient, at times, to keep other Cainites from entering the field of battle. More than one elder has fallen to such a rogue band because all his vampire servitors and even childer had already fled.

After this happens two or three times, most potential invaders get the message and decide to find their glory and new territories elsewhere.

Finally, it's worth noting that the target of an assassination need not be the leader of the rival faction to have the desired effect. The death of the general who planned the attack at the behest of his lord, the military-minded advisor to the duke, the seneschal who mediates between the local Cainites and an overbearing prince — all these and many more make for viable and valuable targets. Remember that in many cases the lord of a land may not even speak the same language as his citizenry; entire reigns have come and gone in which the King of England spoke only

French. If one can eliminate a lord's access to his best military tacticians, even separate him from his own people, his ability to present a viable threat vanishes.

## Advancing One's Own Position

Assassination is not merely a means of protecting what one has from outsiders or invading another's territory without having to face him. It's also popular as a means of advancing one's position at home. The most obvious and most famous situation involves the heir to land, title or crown arranging the death of his own father, so that he might come more swiftly into his inheritance. Plenty of other circumstances for assassination exist, however, and not all of them need involve royalty. A military officer who feels he has been denied a rank he has earned might arrange for his superior to meet an untimely demise, on the assumption that he will be promoted to take the man's place. The best time for this is during war; if the situation requires that someone step into the slain officer's place immediately, less opportunity exists for either an investigation or for an alternative replacement to be located. (Of course, the death of a commanding officer in the midst of battle can also throw an entire army into disarray, but those ambitious and ruthless enough to kill their own commanders usually believe — correctly or not — that they can pull things together once they take charge.)

Although less common, it is not unheard of for members of the clergy to move up through murder as well. The Church is a powerful institution, and many of those who serve her are less concerned with God's glory than their own. Assassination for advancement within Church ranks is rarely detected, assuming the killer makes at least some effort to cover his tracks. The Church is simply ill-equipped to deal with this sort of internal investigation — her inquisitors are normally on the lookout for other things — and, frankly, few in the clergy can comprehend that some among them are capable of such acts. Those few inquisitors who do watch for internal corruption, particularly among the Oculi Dei, are often so paranoid that they cannot tell the true criminals from those innocents who merely draw the wrong sort of attention.

One need not assassinate the person in power to advance one's cause. More common even than the killing of a king or lord by one of his sons is the death of one son at the hands of a brother. A number of nations make use of systems of inheritance that make the elimination of one's siblings a highly attractive option. (Wales is particularly infamous for this sort of thing.) See the Inheritance section, below.

What works for the mortals, obviously, works for the monsters as well. The attack that sent Razkoljna,

## SLEIGHT OF HAND

**A**s mentioned above, more often than not murder is an intensely personal endeavor. **Spoils of War**, however, is about destroying one's enemies for power, territory or material gains and about defending oneself from their attempts to do the same. Personal motivations have little place in a work of this sort. That said, occasionally the personal and political become intertwined to the point where they're difficult to separate. A tactically minded character might cloak a private assassination in the guise of a political message.

Consider, for instance, what might happen if a baron or other landed noble were to learn that the family dwelling on the farm at the edge of his territory included a "witch" — a mage — among their number. The baron may be tempted to force the will-worker to serve him, under threat of exposing her to the Church, inciting the other peasants against the witch and in general making life unlivable for not only the mage but her entire family. If the baron were simply to drop dead the next week, there's no telling what sort of investigation might be launched. If, however, the baron is cut down in public, by an assassin who "accidentally" leaves clues that he was sent by the baron's rival, Lord Bristol, no investigation is required. Of course, such a misdirection might well lead to further conflict and even war, but it does keep the mage's personal motivations hidden behind a false political statement.

the Tzimisce Prince of Krakow, into torpor was orchestrated by one of her own childe, an attempt to remove her so the childe might proceed to run Krakow in his own manner.

The death of a competitor can open opportunities even for those not directly warring with one another. Toward the end of the aforementioned Massasa War, the Hermetic mage Petre Devanu became concerned about Tremere movement into Russia, where he and a number of his brethren had already been forced to retreat. Only two other Hermetic chantries existed between the Cainite forces and his own territories. The leaders of those two chantries, Dirzislau Ivanov and Itka Petrillova, already had an alliance with one another and, due to personal conflicts in the past, refused to broaden that alliance to include Petre's own territories. Petre knew, based on the might of the Tremere coteries in Russia, that the power of two Hermetic chantries could likely survive the coming attack, but one on its own could not.

His solution? He arranged for Ivanov's assassination. Ivanov's chantry was thrown into turmoil, and

On rare occasions, this tactic might be reversed — that is, a political or military assassination might be disguised as something far less suspicious. This is far more difficult to execute, however, as the death of a public or powerful figure tends to draw suspicions of conspiracy no matter how innocuous the manner of passing.

Accidents are the single most common means of hiding an assassination. They can be difficult to arrange — or at least to arrange realistically — but they are quite effective when achieved. The number of kings, princes, dukes and lords who have died due to hunting accidents is staggering. A flash of movement in the woods, an arrow loosed before the target is seen in full, and suddenly one has an empty crown and an open throne. Perhaps instead the wheel of a coach comes loose at just the wrong spot on a treacherous mountain path. Again, difficult to manage, but nigh untraceable.

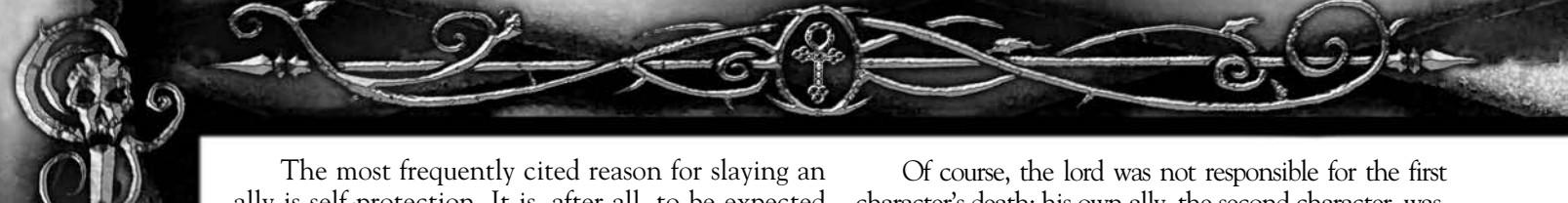
Many characters have exceptional means of orchestrating these mishaps. Cainites can subtly influence the actions of others, causing that deadly arrow to spring from a bow held by someone above reproach or suspicion. Werewolves have little trouble in making it appear as though their target were slain by a wild animal — as, in effect, he was. Mages, of course, specialize in "accidents," causing even the most unlikely sequence of events to result in the death of the target.

Petrillova, suddenly lacking her only ally, was more than happy to reconsider her relations with Petre. By assassinating the leader of a rival — but not enemy — faction, Petre maneuvered his own chantry into a position where he could survive the coming battles. Tonight, his chantry still poses a lethal threat to Tremere efforts in southwestern Russia.

## Assassinating One's Own Allies

It seems a particularly ruthless, even despicable, technique, but the assassination of one's own companions or allies can occasionally provide more valuable opportunities than the allies themselves. For rather obvious reasons, this is not the sort of activity one should undertake frequently, and it should be done only in the most secretive manner possible. Even Cainites tend to frown on those who casually dispose of their own associates, and one who makes a practice of betrayal can expect to find himself alone in the face of a large number of enemies.

Why, then, would one consider such a thing? What is to be gained?



The most frequently cited reason for slaying an ally is self-protection. It is, after all, to be expected that one's companions — perhaps even coconspirators — will learn a great deal about one's activities. Normally, allies who know enough to harm one another by revealing their activities are prevented from doing so by bonds of trust, friendship or at least enlightened self-interest. When such a relationship breaks down — perhaps one of the involved parties decides she has more to gain through betrayal than she has to lose through exposure, or perhaps one of them simply grows too paranoid even to accept the risk of exposure — precious few options are available. Most denizens of the Dark Medieval do not have the ability to remove the knowledge of their activities from their former allies' minds, and even those who do know that such powers are notoriously unreliable in the long run. The death of the other party, however, ensures (barring the practice of some sort of spirit magic) that the knowledge dies with him.

In a similar vein, the death of an ally whose usefulness has passed can often relieve one of inconvenient obligations. This is not a particularly effective way out of debt — it never looks good when all one's creditors begin dropping dead — but it can be effective in thinning the herd, so to speak. The Ventrite Geoffrey, Prince of Paris and head of the Grand Court, made many bargains, promises and alliances to gain the backing necessary to overthrow his sire, Alexander. Now, less than a decade later, the inexperienced prince has proven unable to fulfill all those obligations properly. In recent nights, some few of those Cainites whose aid he beseeched have disappeared from their normal hunting grounds and court circles. So far, none of those to disappear has been of particular import, and the chance remains that their absences are coincidental, but it seems likely that Geoffrey is clearing away some of his more expendable creditors so that he may focus on the important ones.

Finally, for the truly black-hearted, the assassination of one's own allies can provide substantial public and political support. Suppose, for instance, that two characters have a common enemy, a powerful lord with many allies, feared by the commoners who labor on his lands. The allied characters are popular with the people, but the citizens are too frightened to rise up in support.

One evening, as he is addressing the public, one ally is brutally murdered, his killer proudly proclaiming that this is the fate of all who would speak out against his lord. The people are enraged; fear of their lord turns to anger. The other character's own supporters grow in number. Allies of the lord begin to drift away from him as they realize his hold on power is suddenly threatened.

Of course, the lord was not responsible for the first character's death; his own ally, the second character, was. Yet look what he has gained by eliminating his companion.

Such deceptions can easily miscarry. Should the truth ever arise that he, not his rival, arranged the assassination, the backlash will likely strip all support from him and strengthen his enemy beyond his previous levels. This sort of endeavor should be undertaken only by those who are supremely confident in their planning and their ability to keep the truth hidden.

Because the purpose is often to stir up public outrage, this type of assassination is often best accomplished in public; see *A Public Demise*, p. 54.

## Self-Assassination

Uncommon in the extreme, but still worth mentioning, this is a technique to which the supernatural creatures of the world are uniquely suited. Cainites and Garou in particular — but inquisitors and mages to a lesser extent — are capable of faking, surviving or even ignoring injuries that would spell instant death to normal mortals. It is a matter of no difficulty to arrange one's own public murder. This is not only an effective way of dropping out of sight and starting over elsewhere (if, for instance, one is about to be conquered by an enemy against whom one has no other defense), it can also throw one's enemies into disarray. For rather obvious reasons, people do not often prepare to defend themselves against foes who are already dead.

Particularly clever characters may turn this to their advantage even if they themselves didn't plan it. The assassination attempt might well be a real one, arranged by one's enemies, rather than a fake. Even in such cases, it's not complicated to let the assassin believe he's succeeded. Cainites are especially suited for this, as they lack a heartbeat or other signs that would belie the deception.

A warning: Attempt this only with public assassination attempts. Not only is it less useful if people don't know one is "dead," but one runs the risk that the assassin may attempt to remove one's head, set one's body afire or otherwise ensure his success.

## Repercussions

For characters considering assassination as a viable course of action, it's worth taking a moment to dwell on the potential repercussions of that decision. Presumably, if one is considering having someone killed, one has already dismissed any spiritual or moral dangers, but that still leaves several practical risks, most of which revolve not around the character herself, but around the assassin.

The most obvious risk involves discovery. One of the points in hiring an assassin, after all, is that one need not take the risk of being caught oneself. Should the assassin be captured and interrogated, however, the enemy can discover all manner of damaging information. This can lead to counter-assassination attempts, open war or something so simple and yet so potentially damaging as the public exposure of the assassin's employer.

For that matter, the assassin himself may prove a hazard if he decides sufficient profit can be made in blackmailing his former employer. Given the option of paying a sizable sum or allowing the allies of one's victim to learn who was truly responsible for a murder, many choose to pay. This danger can be mitigated somewhat by a careful selection of the assassin. Certain groups, such as the Assamites, abide by codes of professional behavior that forbid extortion of former employers.

Because so many of the dangers are posed by the assassin, some maintain that the elimination of the assassin himself is the best protection. This, however, requires either the employ of a second assassin or that one take the risk of attempting to kill a trained killer — not conducive to a long life. Furthermore, those who develop a reputation for slaughtering their employees find, at best, that no one is willing to work for them. At worst, they find themselves targeted by other assassins in retaliation.

## Poisoning

In the Dark Medieval, disposing of one's enemy can be a difficult proposition. What if a knight wants to murder a baron but owes fealty to him? Leaving a dagger buried in the baron's back is a sure way to attract undue attention. How could a character go about murdering a member of his own family? Or execute a neighboring lord who the character happens to be (unfortunately) allied with? Sometimes family, politics or social expectations prevent an individual from haphazardly waging war against another kingdom, and on top of that, war is messy. Removing one duke from his tower may require a hundred men to give their lives. So what other option is there? Murder? Murder is a crime punishable by torture and death. That doesn't mean it can't be done, of course, only that subtlety is the best course of action. To wit, men have created the art of poisoning. It is the craft of contaminating an opponent's mutton, mead or suit of armor. The characteristics of poisoning mimic the depredations of disease, and few are able to distinguish the difference between the "murdered" and the "ill" in this case. As such, the act of poisoning often goes unpunished, which is precisely the point. A character

might have many reasons to consider poisoning her enemies instead of murdering them or warring with them outright.

**Murder:** Perhaps the number one reason one would poison another in the Dark Medieval world is murder. An inquisitor getting too inquisitive? A character might slip a little belladonna (also called "nightshade") into the communion wine. Is the Dane Duke of Schleswig instigating aggressive land-expansion tactics? Perhaps a tincture of arsenic in his rack of lamb will send him to an early grave. Maybe that old magician from Glastonbury has been casting dark charms on a Cainite's blood slaves to weaken his food supply. The vampire may know that the pits of plums, cherries, even apple seeds contain a poison that could decorate an arrow tip, or could taint a needle sewn into the wizard's robes so when he slips it over his shoulders he doesn't even know when it pierces him in the fatty parts of his back. The desired end of poisoning is typically to remove roadblocks to power. It is silent, can be done from afar, and is virtually untraceable. One might say that in this dark era, it's an ideal murder weapon.

**Weakness:** Poisons need not be for murderous purposes. Their uses are manifold, and one of these uses is to make one weak. Why is this an advantage? Weak individuals (especially those in power) are easier to manipulate. If one appears physically sick or of diminished constitution, one's resistance levels drop to outside manipulation (be it mundane or mystical). If Ranulf, the Earl of Chester, wishes to build Greyfriars Church on land that a resourceful young Cainite wishes to use for other purposes, perhaps paring down his fiery dedication to the cause is worth a look. Or perhaps he merely needs to be a little more pliable so mind control works more readily upon him. Regardless, if he is weakened then he may need someone to step in and make crucial decisions. It may provide a crucial opportunity to allow an irony-minded Cainite to develop a set of stained-glass windows in the Greyfriars Church that detail Caine's encounters with the angels instead of Jesus on the Cross.

The question is, how can a character weaken someone with poison? One means is administering minuscule doses of otherwise lethal poisons. The leaves of wolfsbane (also called monkshood) can be ground up into a peppery substance. Taken in minimal quantities, it produces a weakened state of health along with symptoms of exhaustion and drunkenness. Opium, too, causes such symptoms and gradually weakens the victim by paralyzing the heart and lungs; with the recent incursions from the East (Mongols, particularly), the poppy-based drug is more accessible than ever. In any event, most lethal poisons are lethal only



in certain doses. Anything smaller than that is likely to reproduce frailty and sickness without death, and from there crucial manipulations (and lapses in judgment) may take place.

**Madness:** Some may seek physical weakness, as mentioned above, where others may seek to create a mental weakness instead in the form of madness (or the appearance of madness). Why aim for this? Those who appear mad are not seen with a sympathetic eye in the Dark Medieval world. They are spoken of with hushed tones in dark corners: "That one has fallen prey to the Devil, he has." There is no "therapy" to speak of; lunacy results in the victim being locked up in a dungeon, bled or burned alive in the Piazza del Signoria. Whatever the case, the enemy is removed. Even if he isn't displaced and the signs of insanity are dimmer than expected, vassals and followers still lose faith in their lord if he "sees things" out of the corners of his eyes or walks around mumbling responses to "the voices." Multiple poisons exist that will ameliorate madness. Henbane is one. If this plant is crushed to a powder and introduced into the bloodstream, it produces *temptat mentum*, the "symptoms of madness." It creates frenzied rages in the victim, even so far as to have him frothing at the lips. Some mushrooms, too, can wreck a man's brain. The *amanita* mushrooms (known for their white gills and bumpy caps) can kill a man if ingested whole, but the milky sap that fills their hollow stems and spongy tops produces severe hallucinations when administered. Trowbridge, a Cainite lord in the Welsh city of Caernarvon, had one stumbling block in convincing the baron of Caermarthenshire to house Trowbridge's collection of "sensitive relics," and that was the baron's adviser, Ifor.

So Trowbridge poisoned him with henbane. Not only did the baron cease to trust his once-gifted advisor, but he commanded Welsh chirurgeons to perform the act of trepanning on the man, where a hole is drilled in

the skull to expose the brain to the healing element of "air." Needless to say, Trowbridge's path was clear once the advisor was left a gibbering vegetable.

## Mystical Poisons

Poisons affect those with mortal constitutions. The average mortal, from vassal to king, from monk to pope, is vulnerable to toxins and venoms. Other supernatural beings, too, can be affected; mages are very much human, as are inquisitors, and their health be diminished by a skilled poisoner. What about two of the more stalwart denizens of the Dark Medieval, the vampire and the werewolf?

Cainites are undead, so poisons don't make much difference if administered in the standard ways (food, drink, clothes, arrows). If a Cainite drinks the blood of a poisoned individual, however, she may experience negative side effects. The *amanita* mushroom in a person's blood causes hallucinations (both auditory and visual) in a vampire. Hemlock in the blood also adversely affects Cainites. It causes a deep, spreading numbness that, while it may allow them to ignore wounds for a time, also slows them significantly to the point of having difficulty even accessing their own Disciplines. Of course, persuading a Cainite to drink the blood of the poisoned is a chore in and of itself. After all, what self-respecting vampire would drink from the sick or mentally ill?

A character might circumvent this problem by poisoning a vampire's herd of mortals with a toxin that doesn't reveal itself immediately. It is said that Nevar the Night-Wielder (a Shadow Lord werewolf) poisoned the herd of a Moorish Lasombra during the Festival of San Fermin with a slow-acting poison called bittersweet.

### SYSTEM

The act of poisoning, and all it encompasses, can be distilled down to a few simple systems. Identifying poisons requires a Perception + Medicine roll (difficulty 7). Administering the poisons can be done with an Intelligence + Medicine roll, with the difficulty contingent upon where the poison is being placed. (Placing poison in food might be difficulty 6, placing it in a suit of armor might be 7, and actually administering it to an unknowing person through a puncturing of flesh would be 8.) This may be combined with a Stealth roll at the Storyteller's behest. Curing poisons or locating antidotes can also be done through Perception + Medicine (for locating antidotes) and Intelligence + Medicine (for applying the antidote). Please see *Dark Ages: Vampire*, p. 257, for more information on poisons in the Dark Medieval.

The Cainite imbibed the herd's blood as usual, but the poison acted slowly. Come the next evening, the herd died, hemorrhaging out of mouth and eye, and the Cainite found that their vitae burned inside him and wouldn't fuel his Disciplines. It wouldn't even purge from his system without many days of sleep (by which time the pack had tracked down his haven and was already breaking in the door).

Werewolves are an entirely different matter. They are alive but have such vitality that even the strongest poisons last only an hour or two before their bodies purge them. That doesn't mean it's impossible to poison a Garou, it's just extraordinarily difficult. Some poisons, properly prepared, have properties that will harm a werewolf. One of these is wolfsbane. Prepared by a skilled herbalist, this plant burns a werewolf's bilious humors from the inside, tearing at his innards like hot metal, but only if ingested. Henbane, on the other hand, doesn't harm werewolves directly, but does incite their Rage, putting them in a violent, uncontrollable state for a short time. This might be perfect for characters who wish to make an otherwise calm Garou (one in negotiations for an alliance that the character does not wish to occur, perhaps) seem like an untrustworthy monster.

It is also said that mages of the Spirit-Talkers are capable of "awakening" the properties of almost any plant with supernatural alchemy, and that many of these plants contain shadowy properties that act as strange poisons, sometimes causing hemorrhaging, vomiting, the drying and splitting of skin or even permanent madness.

## Antidotes

While poisons can be used as weapons, they can also be used as a form of twisted blackmail. A Cainite looking to manipulate a member of the mortal nobility without the use of potentially fallible mind control could poison said noble and then offer the antidote. Antidotes to poisons are becoming available in this day and age, but to a select few only. For instance, the terrible madness caused by the *amanita* mushroom can be counteracted by small doses of belladonna. A character could easily offer the antidote in the bargaining process. He could request land, safe passage, wealth or merely the promise of a future "favor" by saving the life of the poisoned noble. Not only does the noble get to live, but the Cainite has then shown his mastery over life and death, which is always a frightening display of power.

One poison often has multiple antidotes. Some are certain to work, others are purely superstitious in nature. While every supposedly poison has an antidote, the only people likely to have catalogued these



## UNCONVENTIONAL POISONS

Few know the art of poisoning. In fact, more often than not, laymen have only their superstitions as evidence when attempting to poison one another. As such, they turn to some rather unconventional "poisons," most of which have little to no effect. Some of these include menstrual blood, crow's blood, hair from a foxtail soaked in brine, baby animals that were forcibly stung to death by hornets, grave dirt or the fecal droppings of mice and rats. These "poisons" could occasionally spread disease (especially in the case of the blood or fecal matter), but more often than not wouldn't poison a fly, unless treated magically.

are either the "doctors" of the time or professional poisoners (and such a profession does exist). If a character isn't able to learn the true antidote to his affliction, men on the streets are always selling sure-fire "cure-alls" to counteract toxins. Amulets, rings, talismans ... all are available, sold by charlatans to help counter poisons and disease. The truth is that they don't work, unless of course an actual wizard crafted them, and the chances of that are slim. Other strange "cures" come in the form of bezoar stones. These stones are nothing more than the cemented collection of hair and other biological matter found in the stomachs of stags and foxes. These "magical stones" are thought to draw out poisons if rubbed on the skin or lips of a dying man. Again, unless somehow enchanted by a mage, these stones are ultimately useless (though expensive).

## Administering Poison

Obtaining poisons (if a character knows what to look for) isn't difficult. Poisons grow everywhere. Poisoners, alchemists and doctors sell such items for the right price. The difficulty is less about obtaining poisons and more about administering them.

Food and drink are one of the primary methods of delivery. Crafty poisoners use either spicy or pungent food along with wine or ale. This way, the strong tastes of the meal overpower any possible taste of the poison. The question then is, how will a character slip it into the food? A poisoner may do her own dirty work, go to the kitchens and (for instance) pepper the food with ground-up henbane. She could pay (or, if possible, manipulate the mind of) a kitchen servant or scullery maid to help in the process. One of the problems, however, with poisoning someone's food is a new servant position known as a "taster." This servant's single job is to taste

every meal and every drink before it ever passes before the noble. That way, if the servant drops dead, the noble will know his food is toxic. Luckily (for the poisoner), only the wealthiest of lords are able to afford and cajole men into the position of taster. Another way around the "taster" servant is to poison the noble's tableware instead of the food. Forks and knives tainted with a tincture of poison might do the trick nicely.

Other means exist, beyond food and drink, to poison someone. Needles sewn into clothes, or placed in armor, can be dipped in a particular poison. (A group of necromancers of the Old Faith murdered dozens with a small needle dipped in a compound poison of *digitalis* (foxglove) and monkshood. The needle was placed in the toes of victim's shoes, where they couldn't feel the prick through their callused skin.) Bouquets of flowers can even be poisoned — when a victim inhales deeply of the flower's scent, she pulls a powdered toxin into her lungs. Arguably, if clever enough, a poisoner could taint any item, including ladders, well buckets, Bibles and even religious relics. Many poisoners are actually capable of inventing these methods on the fly, keeping potential poisons with them in what was called a "poison ring." This ornamental ring's jewel piece could be snapped open, and inside the small opening a poisonous mixture could be held, ready and waiting for the opportunity to murder or sicken an adversary.

## Disease

In the Dark Medieval, disease is a widespread, uncontrollable monster: leprosy, cholera, typhoid, a half-dozen different plagues (the bubonic or "Black Death," the pneumonic, the enteric), even the common cold. Medicine is a concoction of brutal guesswork that may involve bloodletting, sawing off the "sickened" limb or conjuring some herbal cure straight from the pages of folklore, which makes even the smallest infection a life-threatening event. Nobody has a concept of "germs," no proof where diseases come from. Are they a curse from God? A trap sprung upon mankind from the Devil? Both theories, and many others, seem viable.

Some doctors have a base understanding from the Greeks that disease is a natural phenomenon, not a cosmic one, and affects the body's four "humors" (blood, phlegm, black bile, yellow bile) in different ways. From these individuals comes the knowledge that indeed these plagues can be cured or at least controlled.

Some are capable of twisting the idea, however. Curing disease may not be possible, but controlling it — and using it as a weapon — is. If poison is a bow and arrow, however, disease is a catapult and boulder. Poison is precise and silent, easily manageable by the

wielder. Disease is rarely precise. If used as a weapon, it is hardly confinable and is capable of felling foe and friend alike. The character can not "aim" the Black Death to sicken only those he opposes; the best he can do is warn allies ahead of time that perhaps a "witch-woman warned of a coming disease" and hope they take the hint and go out of town on pilgrimage.

## Pestilential Warfare

Disease in the Dark Medieval is unpleasant and uncontrollable. Why would anyone even attempt to use it as a weapon? What motives lie behind attempting to use a plague to decimate one's enemies?

## Widespread Death and Panic

With disease, it's hard to kill just one person. A bit of poison or a well placed crossbow bolt will make quick work of an individual. What if a whole village or barony is on a character's list of adversaries? Perhaps a character wants to take (or just destroy) someone's domain without ever having to raise a single sword? Instead of the slash-and-burn technique, disease might do the trick. The characteristics of the time allow for quick and merciless plague transmission. Few mortals are well nourished, even among the nobles. Sanitation is poor. The water supply is often from a single source. Food stores are limited and rot quickly. All of

### THE BIG KILLERS

A few major diseases are responsible for the majority of death in 1230. These diseases are vast, conquering sicknesses, capable of sweeping entire villages off the map in the span of a few weeks or months. Others are less deadly and instead leave the victims trapped in ruined shells of skin and bone. While literally hundreds of maladies exist in Dark Medieval Europe, these are a few of the major ones:

**Bubonic Plague:** Also known as the "Black Death," this disease has the proud distinction of being the biggest, deadliest plague to have ever sickened the world. Its darkness spanned almost a millennium, popping up everywhere, sometimes killing a single town, other times sweeping across and murdering millions (as it may have in the sixth century, and does again in the mid-14th century). Spread by fleas on the backs of rats and "plague dogs," the Black Death afflicts its victims with gory handiwork. First come the nausea, aches, chills, fever. Then dark swellings appear under armpits, on necks, over crotches that began to bulge and darken from red to black. These pustules (or "boobies") would split open and weep pus and blood.

**Pneumonic Plague:** Something of the little sister to the bubonic plague, this disease was a massive spread of pneumonia, passed from person to person by coughing, sneezing and other moist transmissions. Pustules don't occur, but fever and nausea soon accompany a hacking cough that brings up blood from the lungs. It stays in the body for a few days before fatality, thus giving it time to spread.

**Enteric Plague:** This plague doesn't spread well, because its lifespan is too short inside of the human body. It kills the hosts too quickly, tearing up the insides of the diseased, churning their guts into spongy,

disintegrating waste. Similar to the Ebola virus seen in the modern age, this disease is not a sweeping epidemic, but appears from time to time, decimating households or densely populated towns.

**Cholera:** Cholera in the 13th century doesn't exist at the pandemic levels it later grows to in the 19th, but during this time it is present in a form commonly called the "Red Death" (later used in the Poe story). The disease is thought to originate from the Indian subcontinent and affects the wetter, warmer regions to the south (Greece, Italy, Portugal) rather than colder climates. It is a diarrheic illness; the body flushes its fluids quickly through the bowels, leaving the victim dehydrated and wracked with shock. Death can occur in hours or weeks. Cholera victims (along with victims of many other rampant medieval diseases) are considered to have a "disease of the sinner." The malady itself is viewed as a curse levied by God or Satan and is indicative of the wickedness of the infected.

**Leprosy:** Leprosy is a disease found in every town in the Dark Medieval, notable because it lingers without killing. Church and government worked together more than a century ago to establish a circuit of leper colonies and hospitals covering all of Europe to house those sad individuals affected by this illness. Currently, France alone has more than 2,000 of these leper colonies and seeks to build more. Lepers gain a host of cruel symptoms: damaged nerves, sensory loss and confusion, major muscle weakness and the trademark skin lesions. These lesions range from pink to bruise-colored and appear as rashes, hard nodules, scaly skin or other flesh disruptions. Eventually, gangrene sets in and literally begins to rot parts of the body away, hence the image of a leper whose fingers and toes begin dropping off.

these detriments allow disease to decimate a population. Even if it doesn't kill, it will certainly cause unparalleled panic while destroying morale, hope and faith in short order. Plague pits must be dug, houses are filled with ripe and rotting bodies, buildings must be burned to the ground. Barons are forced to sit in their towers and peer through arrow slits, wondering when the sickness will creep under their door and snuff them out like a candle's flame.

### Ruin a Food Supply

Food is obviously necessary for survival, and so it becomes a vulnerable resource. Destroy the food, help destroy life. It's too difficult to sicken crops (and the knowledge for that doesn't really exist), but animals, including those kept as livestock, are vulnerable to disease. Even if they don't die from it, it may be a sickness they can pass along to those who eat them.

Cainites have a similar problem. A Cainite's dinner menu is restricted. People don't like to go out at night. So when a Cainite finds a steady blood supply — be it a local brothel or an inventory of servants — that Cainite has safety and security in the form of blood. Disease counters this quickly. If a Cainite's herd is brought low by pestilence, not only is he unlikely to feed from them, but eventually that herd will die, cutting short the potential blood that he can drink. Bishop Bernard Rousch, a golden child of the Red Order, travels Europe looking for those elements of society (vampires and witches, mostly) who will not be summoned to the courts. In his crusade against French Cainites, one of his primary tactics is infecting vampire herds with pneumonic plague.

### Weaken an Army

While the Sixth Crusade ended only a year past, skirmishes of small armies constantly kick up blood and dust across Europe, sometimes those instigated by the Cainites or the Inquisition. When marshalling armies against armies, it's always preferable to fight a weaker enemy, but sometimes the adversary's troops are stronger, perhaps in number *and* in ability. Pestilence, however, weakens even the most terrible army. The Tremere Marcella, a learned alchemist and follower of the Road of Kings, read portents that her home of Tickhill would be besieged by the superior army of a neighboring duke. Unwilling to accept defeat, even at the hands of a much larger army, Marcella sent a scribe to the duke's army to make an ineffectual plea bargain. Several knights murdered the scribe, as Marcella had expected. What the army did not know was that the scribe was a carrier of the pneumonic plague, and by the time they marched on Tickhill, they were already showing signs of illness (coughing, nausea, fever). The army fought poorly and



Tickhill remained as it had been. (The gruesome postscript is that the disease came back to haunt the town, carried by the knights of the opposing army. In two short weeks, most of Tickhill was dead or dying, and Marcella's blood supply was significantly weakened.)

## Tactics

Many reasons exist to use disease as a weapon, but the question remains: How can one wield pestilence as an implement of war without sickening oneself or one's own allies?

A water supply is one means of spreading pestilence quietly. Villages, even whole cities, usually pull their water from one or two sources. Infect the water supply, and infect those who drink from it. A character merely needs a plague victim (not hard to find, sadly) and to weigh it down in the river or hurl it in the well. It won't be long before people start dying. With a plague, it truly takes only the infection of a single victim to spread the disease. Not everyone, however, was concerned about being stealthy. The Irish village of Kilkenny nearly fell to the Black Death when a Malkavian dragged a plague-infested body through the streets (and even into individual homes) in a lunatic effort to show the townsfolk how the Devil had encircled them all.

During warfare, other options exist. Siege technology is reaching new heights at this time, and many are advancing an idea that was used first during the Peloponnesian War of the fifth century, which is to throw plague bodies over the walls. Again, it takes only one infection to cause pestilence to take root. Once the castle or fortress is besieged by disease from within (and by an army outside), it usually falls within a week.

Supernatural beings have their own ways and means of attacking a populace with disease. One Cainite, a Nosferatu by going by the moniker "Lucretia the Cess Queen," is infamous for sampling the blood of every type of disease victim she can find. Her lips, fangs, even her blood teem with leprosy, plague, cholera. One bite, even the barest nip, from Lucretia, and the victim ends up afflicted by many cruel maladies.

Werewolves have their means of bringing disease to bear. The Garou commune with spirits, and since everything has some representation in the spirit world, the werewolves can quite literally converse with the invisible agents of disease. They can convince these spirits to attack a population, or they can negotiate for the withdrawal of such pestilence.

Mages can conjure an epidemic out of thin air. Using their magics, they can also defend from (or sometimes cure) such hideous afflictions. Unfortunately, mages do not have the physical defense that the Cainites and Garou maintain. The wizards are all too human and as such are ultimately vulnerable to the very same

plagues that the rest of the Dark Medieval world is infected with.

Finally, inquisitors are unlikely to consider or use disease as a weapon in war. Plague is a weapon of the Devil, and no member of the Church would willingly use the Devil's weapon, even if used against the Devil himself. If, however, the Inquisition felt that an entire region was under the influence of the Adversary, some of the more fanatical and militant members of the organization might well advocate unleashing the forces of disease on the area. God knows His own, after all.

## Smear Campaigns

The death of an adversary isn't always necessary, or even productive. Sometimes a corpse would draw the wrong sort of attention or put the wrong person in power; sometimes an enemy offers more opportunity alive than dead. Killing a rival's reputation can be just as effective, without the messy aftermath.

## Uses of a Smear Campaign

What can one hope to accomplish by destroying an enemy's name and reputation? Certainly it brings a high degree of personal satisfaction, but that's not sufficient impetus for most characters to undertake the effort and expend the resources a smear campaign requires. Fortunately—or perhaps unfortunately, depending on which side of the campaign one is on—dragging one's foe through the proverbial mud provides plenty of other benefits.

### Weakening a Rival's Position

A noble, lord, community leader, churchman or anyone else in a position of authority is absolutely

#### OOPS

**L**t's important to remember that disease isn't an obedient weapon. Infect an adversarial duke and duchess? Great. If they infect their whole servile staff? No problem. Even if the disease goes on to afflict the whole of their duchy, that's fine, as it's all the easier to claim the domain when all that remain are corpses. It doesn't necessarily stop there. One plague victim can go to the next town, the next barony or your character's barony. Then the little "weapon" has become an epidemic that is carelessly wiping the whole slate clean. It's theorized that the Tartar siege of the city of Kaffa, where plague bodies were catapulted over walls, was the impetus behind the sweeping deaths of more than twenty-five million Europeans. Oops, indeed.



dependent on the commoners over whom he rules. It doesn't matter if the peasants love him or hate him — and many examples of both extremes exist — as long as the people do what they're told. Without his serfs and vassal farmers, a landholder has no crops to tax. Without peasants to conscript, lords have no armies to fend off their neighbors or aid their kings when called to fight. Most common folk are unwilling to overtly defy or turn against their lord, no matter how badly they think of him. Their efforts on his behalf may prove halfhearted, however. If they are convinced their lord is wicked, cruel or incompetent, they may hide crops and profits from his assessors, fight poorly on his behalf or desert entirely, even sabotage his operations or — when they can get away with it — kill his agents and tax collectors. In and of itself, this is insufficient to remove the target from power; while a lord's strength rests partially with his subjects, they don't have the authority to remove him, except in the very rare cases of those small villages in which the local reeve or mayor is chosen by the citizenry. To be effective, however, a smear campaign need not remove the subject from power, but merely weaken his authority. In the face of invasion, or even a political attempt to seize power from within his own territory, a lord may find that the full cooperation of his citizens can spell the difference between victory and defeat.

The truly successful smear campaign might even lead to open revolt by the peasantry. This requires substantial planning and the placement of agitators within enemy territory, people to fan the flames of rumor and resentment into violence. Most peasants are terrified, and rightly so, of their lord. Even with the best efforts, a rebellion can likely be provoked only under the worst of leaders, those whom the peasants would hate even without one's own efforts at smearing their names. Still, when circumstances allow, one can remove one's enemy from power without the need for direct military action.

As a side note, even nobles sometimes need money and borrow capital from moneylenders, other nobles and institutions. Many of these are willing to extend credit indefinitely to a lord with a good reputation. When that reputation begins to suffer, those he owes often panic. The victim of a good smear campaign, in addition to finding his power base weakened among the populace, may well find many or even all of his outstanding debts called in at once. Even if this doesn't break him, it's almost certain to leave him with insufficient operating capital to manage his holdings properly — or to defend them.

## Making and Breaking Alliances

The smearing of someone's name need not serve as the prelude to war or invasion. Sometimes the goal

is to devalue the target in the eyes of a particular individual. If one's enemy enjoys powerful alliances, it may be possible to shatter those relations by convincing the allies that their companion is unworthy of their attention.

For instance, the city of Jerusalem has two claimants to the princedom, the Salubri Qawiyya el-Ghaduba, the true power in the region, and the Ventrue Lucius Trebius Rufus, a political figurehead who seeks to be more. Despite their competing ambitions, the two Cainites have a cooperative relationship, neither seeking to depose or eliminate the other. One reason for that cooperation is a common enemy, the Ravnos Varsik. In recent nights, Varsik — utilizing both his own impressive powers of illusion and his more mundane (but no less impressive) skills of persuasion and deception — has been spreading rumors of el-Ghaduba's fall from grace. Throughout the Cainite population of Jerusalem and its surroundings, hushed whispers claim that the Salubri has grown mad with power, that she has become the soul-devouring monster the Tremere accuse her clanmates of being, that she will soon threaten the sanctity of the Diet of Olives — the treaty that ensures peace between Christian and Muslim Cainites in the region.

It's all a lie, of course. But if Rufus can be convinced, his alliance with el-Ghaduba will crumble, possibly erupting in open war — leaving Varsik free to do as he will, unimpeded by the cooperation of his greatest foes.

Although less common, the destruction of someone's good name can be used to cement an alliance, rather than to shatter one. A lord who finds power slipping through his fingers as his citizens and his fellow nobles curse his name and shun his presence knows he's in a precarious situation. He lacks a loyal, determined army to ward off invasion. He lacks political allies who might support him in his weakness.

It might seem counterproductive to destroy, or even weaken, the reputation of someone with whom one desires an alliance, but it is an effective way of forcing him to accept such a proposal. A lord in this position cannot afford to be choosy. Circumstances dictate that he accept nearly any offer of alliance that comes his way, even if the alliance is far more beneficial for the other party than it is for him.

## Civil Unrest as Cover

As mentioned above, it is occasionally possible to incite riots, uprisings and other convenient forms of civil unrest and violence by turning a local populace against those in authority. Certainly useful if one seeks to overthrow the current lord, yes, but civil

unrest and violence serve as a wonderful cover for other, unrelated activities. The increase in corpses that invariably follows from a gathering of Cainites can be hidden in the piles of dead resulting from such riots. The deliberate murder of a few select victims can go unnoticed when surrounded by widespread violence; it's much like hiding a leaf in a forest or a book in a library. Finally, if a pack, coterie or other group of characters needs to escape from a region undetected, the chaos of an uprising provides the perfect opportunity to disappear. By the time anyone realizes that they are not among the dead, they'll be long gone — assuming anyone even bothers to check.

## Means and Methods

The peasants and even most lords of the Dark Medieval are illiterate, so passing out bills and leaflets proclaiming a ruler unfit is foolish (even if one had the means to do so). Plenty of methods exist, however, to spread word of a rival's incompetence or wickedness — true or false — that do not rely on the audience's ability to read.

### Ballads, Tales and Rumors

Life in the 13th century is hard, and people are hungry for diversion and entertainment at every opportunity. As xenophobic as the citizenry usually is, a traveling storyteller or troubadour can be a welcome visitor to a town, provided he minds his manners and stays well away from the women. While every town boasts a denizen or two with some musical or oratory skill, a professional entertainer can provide the citizens with a few nights of quality entertainment.

The traveling storyteller is more than just a means of entertainment, however. He also serves as the only source of news for many towns and even some far-flung cities. The information he carries is more precious than gold, more welcome even than his songs and stories. He is, quite literally, the eyes and ears of many of the communities on his route, and as such they are blind and deaf without him.

If a troubadour comes to town, then, with news of a lord's depredations; if his ballads and tales paint the baron as a fool and a tyrant; if he whispers rumors that the villagers' liege taxes them far more heavily than other lords tax their own peasants.... When the people hear this sort of thing from a minstrel they know, they tend to believe it. Even when it isn't true.

For this to work, one must find a bard willing to spread songs and tales ridiculing and undermining one's rivals. It's all but impossible to coerce a wandering storyteller into spreading such misinformation. The nomadic nature of his existence means almost certainly

that he will pass beyond the reach of all but the most influential lords, making threats of physical harm relatively ineffective. Most supernatural methods of persuasion require constant reinforcement or reapplication; this, too, is difficult to accomplish in the face of the subject's constant travels. Still, those few supernatural means of control that last — the blood oath, for instance — are viable options. Blackmailing the minstrel with some past indiscretion may prove effective, if one can discover something sufficiently damaging, as can threats of reprisal against friends, family or holdings. Still, these techniques aren't recommended; should the troubadour ever free himself from one's influence, the damage he can do by turning this same technique on his former master is substantial.

Better by far to recruit the entertainer as a willing agent. Few itinerant storytellers are wealthy. The offer of patronage, the dream of artists of all stripe, is a powerful incentive for cooperation. In exchange for a modicum of money, the bard may prove willing to spread whatever tales his new patron likes.

For troubadours who cannot be bought — or if one lacks the resources to make long-term bribery an option — one may simply try to convince the minstrel that one's rival truly is vile, then let the minstrel spread tales on his own. A few words whispered to the bard, heard as "rumor," may do the job. If not, an attack on the minstrel's person or his friends — combined with false evidence that the intended victim of the tales and ballads is responsible — can start even the most reticent of tongues to wagging, spreading word of wickedness and villainy.

One may attempt to spread false rumors without the use of a troubadour, obviously. Words whispered in this tavern or that church have a way of making their way throughout a community, if they're interesting enough. Without a trusted source, such as the aforementioned minstrel, these rumors are less likely to be believed and will likely require more time to spread. Nevertheless, properly cultivated, a rumor with the ring of truth can slowly but surely erode people's faith in their rulers.

### The Big Lie

It's not enough merely to portray a local lord as cruel or corrupt; the peasants expect such things of their leaders. If one is going to do true harm to one's rival, he must be made to look bad in a way that directly impacts the masses, or at least his fellow nobles.

#### The subject is aiding an invading force.

War and invasion are constant threats in the Dark Medieval, and it's always the common man who suffers the most. It's the peasants' homes that are destroyed, their sons who are impressed into service, they who bear

## SATIRE AND RIDICULE

**L**t's worth noting that laughter can be almost as powerful as hatred and fear. Most who would destroy a rival's reputation seek to inspire hatred or contempt for their target among his allies and the common folk. Particularly clever and quick-witted individuals might instead spread tales of their victim's follies and foibles, or write ballads and plays mocking his habits and policies.

A lord who becomes a laughingstock has lost much of his authority. The peasants don't take him seriously and thus don't take his orders seriously. His allies distance themselves for fear their own reputations may be tainted. For those accustomed to being respected or feared, few things are more painful than being laughed at.

As a side benefit, a particularly despotic lord might respond to a campaign of public satire and humiliation by cracking down on the populace with military force — thus inspiring the hatred of the masses and doing even more damage to his own authority and credulity.

the burden of raised taxes to support the war effort. The notion that a noble might side with — and possibly even arrange for — an outside invasion is both frightening and infuriating. Nor is it particularly farfetched; a minor noble under one lord might well expect to be awarded a higher position under a new ruler.

Even if the peasants *en masse* don't believe this rumor, the chance exists that the target's brethren among the nobility will hear of his "brewing treason" and tend to him on their own.

### The subject is plotting against the king (or other local lord).

A close cousin to the previous rumor, this may not inspire the commoners to rise up in revolt, but it's guaranteed to damage the target's standing with his fellows. Sometimes one doesn't even need evidence of a conspiracy. So many reasons exist for plotting against one's liege, and men in power are often so fearful and paranoid to begin with, that the mere *appearance* of treason may be sufficient to condemn the victim. Should evidence be required, it's not hard to fabricate. Testimony from a few properly bribed, threatened or Dominated witnesses, a forged letter left where it will be found and the "confession" of a fellow conspirator are all easily arranged, and sufficient to tarnish even the most sparkling reputation.

### The grass is greener ....

Some of the most pervasive rumors are those regarding the quality of life in neighboring regions.

People living in hardship frequently believe that people elsewhere have it easier; it's human nature. When "common knowledge" confirms that belief — even in the form of unsubstantiated rumors — the masses grow sullen, resenting their lot in life and the lords who keep them down. One isn't likely to inspire a revolution in this manner; the peasants are accustomed to being downtrodden. These rumors slowly erode a lord's support, as his vassals begin withholding crops and taxes, and begin deserting rather than taking up arms against his enemies.

This tactic isn't limited to mortal populations. Whispers circulate through Cainite communities of the nigh-utopian domains controlled by younger vampires who have cast off the shackles of their elders' laws, who rule in a matter befitting the dignity of all Cainites, who reward merit and ability rather than age and tradition. Wise vampires dismiss these rumors as unfounded propaganda, but in these chaotic nights, a growing number of neonates choose to believe.

### Our lord consorts with the Devil!

In this age of religious fervor and superstition, the accusation of maleficium can destroy even society's elite. Should there be proof of such accusations, other nobles, the peasants and the Church are all likely to step in and make life extremely difficult — and possibly quite short — for the accused.

Such proof is not hard to fabricate. After all, the characters are most likely "monsters" themselves; even those who appear human have access to abilities that are clearly unnatural. All a character need do is ensure that she is seen consorting with her target or his known proxies, entering or leaving his estate or fighting alongside his soldiers. Some element of risk is attached to this, of course, but if no one locally knows the character by name, or if she can avoid exposing her face, she can provide irrefutable "evidence" that her target is conspiring with the minions of Hell.

### Victimizing the Populace

It's possible to destroy a lord's reputation without ever moving against him directly. The citizens who dwell in the lord's realm, from peasants to merchants to churchmen to lesser nobles, all rely on their liege, who is obligated — morally and (in many places) legally — to protect those who serve him.

Given the preternatural abilities of the creatures of the Dark Medieval, it should prove relatively simple to torment and harass individuals and even entire communities in ways the local lord is powerless to stop. Werewolves can cause untold destruction and suffer precious little risk from the blades of the lord's soldiers. Vampires are masters of stealth and misdirection, allowing them to escape long before the authorities can

respond to their activities. Mages can create enormous amounts of “accidental” havoc that cannot easily be traced to any particular source.

It’s vital that one downplay the presence of the supernatural in these attacks. The peasantry must believe that the ills afflicting them are of a sort that the lord could prevent, if only he weren’t so incompetent/dishonest/uncaring. If he’s unwilling to aid his people in their time of need, why should they support him with their taxes, their toil and their blood?

Better even than proving a lord incapable of defending his people is making the lord responsible for their suffering. One might, for instance, consider robbing — perhaps even slaughtering — the local tax collectors. Even the kindest lord will have to raise taxes to make up for lost revenues, and most will take swift and bloody retribution on the villages in which their collectors disappeared. Rumors of conspiracy against the crown, the death or disappearance of a member of the royal family or a friend of the local Cainite prince, and whispers of uprising are all sufficient cause for most nobles to come down hard on their citizenry. Not only does this turn the commoners against their leaders, it also provides a sizable diversion for the lord’s loyal soldiers, who cannot watch the borders if they’re busy patrolling the towns.

Truly manipulative individuals might make it appear that their subject is acting against his own people (or against a neighboring community) when such is not the case. A raid on a border town with the lord’s (forged) standard flying overhead has all sorts of political and martial repercussions, but these efforts need not be so heavy-handed. Peasants are accustomed to thinking of anyone in rich man’s garb as potential agents of the nobility. Should a well dressed (and well protected) individual begin demanding extra taxes or tithes in the name of the local ruler, the common man is likely to believe him to be exactly what he claims, despite the absence of any corroborating evidence.

One should be careful with this sort of pretense. Should the truth emerge that the lord has been framed — even if no one learns who the guilty party is — the subject might actually gain in status and influence from the sympathy of others and the peasantry’s anger at being manipulated.

## Diplomacy

Diplomacy is the art of making trades and compromises that, despite appearances of equality, favor one party over the other. It is the melody to which nobles dance with one another, the drumbeat to which they synchronize their daily (or nightly) existence. It is also a weapon, the means by which they duel.

In order to join this dance, one must already be a part of that world — either a noble or someone of sufficient importance that nobles would listen to what one has to say — or one must be willing to work hard to break in. Presented below are means both for entering the field and accomplishing one’s goals once on it.

Diplomacy is a rather broad subject, however. Clarity, if nothing else, demands it be broken down and addressed in more manageable bits.

## Alliances

Alliances in the Dark Medieval world, be they between mortals or monsters, are ephemeral, fleeting things. Coalitions do not form because of friendships, they grow out of the need for mutual benefit. It’s rarely a question of honor, rarely indicative of any kind of respect. An alliance grows out of necessity.

## Cainites

Machiavelli (who isn’t born for another 230 years or so) might have based his great work *The Prince* on the machinations of the Cainites in AD 1230. Vampires, already embroiled in the War of Princes, are master manipulators and puppet-masters and tend to come out untarnished in most of their alliances; that is, provided their alliances aren’t with one another. Cainites partner with anyone provided they believe they have the edge and can come out of the deal with unlife and domain intact. For instance, the crumbling city of Kerev is coming under pressure from Mongol incursions (forces represented by Genghis Khan’s grandson, Batu, and existing outside the Gangrel warlord Jhunakhai’s influence) and has its current prince, the Ventre Jerek Slobodny, mounting a hurried defense against the increasing attacks. Slobodny walks the Road of Sin and normally shuns any who aren’t steeped in depravity. But his town, while a dung heap, is still his dung heap, and he wishes to defend it with sword and fang. As such, Slobodny has shuttered his Beast and extended an olive branch to a group of Ashen Knights encamped outside of Kiev. These knights, followers of the Road of Heaven, are neophytes (and are also unaware of Slobodny’s wickedness) and have joined with Jerek to combat the pagan hordes. (Slobodny’s alliance therefore presents two advantages: First, he has aid against the Mongol intrusion, and second, he now has new Cainites to corrupt to his perverse ways.)

Unfortunately, most vampires have great difficulty holding on to partnerships for long. All in all, the War of Princes is an immense chess match among the undead nobility, and most alliances end up as

nothing more than broken oaths. The most common “alliance” is between vampires of the High Clans and the Low Clans. The Low Clans (especially neonates) often end up scrabbling for scraps beneath the tables of the High, and will often prostrate themselves before their superiors in coalitions that clearly are stacked against them. Of course, many of the Low Clans consider this a survival-of-the-fittest situation; being the hound of a king is better than ending up as a flea-ridden plague cur. Since they are undying, many of the Low Clans feel that if they can just ride out the imbalance, that some night the tables may turn and High Clan bastards will sup on beggars and lepers.

Other alliances can occur between Cainites should they be fighting a common enemy (a slash-and-burn attack from vengeful werewolves definitely encourages Cainites to band together, if only for a brief time) or should a domain exist that can’t be obtained without outside help. The coterie is the smallest example of these types of alliances, but even this unit can crumble when its goal is achieved.

## Werewolves

Alliances aren’t so crucial to werewolves, and their Rage and zealotry stops them from accepting even a temporary alliance with anyone they find objectionable, even if that means they end up dead in the process. Most alliances involving the Garou are made between septs. Usually, septs controlled by the same tribe will ally, sometimes forming moon bridges between their caerns.

Some tribes, however, are more likely to angle for alliances with the other monsters of the Dark Medieval. The Shadow Lords and Silver Fangs are both “noble” tribes that are typically immersed in human culture more than the others. They are also most likely to bump shoulders with Cainites and wizards, which creates opportunities for pacts and alliances (though Warders and even Children of Gaia run into Cainites in the urban centers of Europe). Groups of wizards still exist (primarily of Baltic and Slavic origin) that hold allegiance to ancient, pagan gods — and while the Garou don’t worship these gods, they nonetheless recognize that the pre-Christian faiths are much more compatible with their world view than the alternatives. The Silver Fangs have maintained a long-lasting alliance with a group of these mages, a warrior band calling themselves the Sons of Dzarovit. These Old Faith mages openly rebel against the Roman Catholic Church and are secretly funded by the old wealth of the Silver Fang royalty. The Sons thus manage to fuel their anti-crusade, and the Silver Fangs have a group of martially trained mages to point at their enemies like a poison-tipped arrow.

Even more appropriate to alliance with werewolves are the Spirit-Talkers; Garou can at least understand and appreciate those who speak to the most ancient of spirits. Alliances with Cainites, however, are nearly unheard of. A rare few Bone Gnawers and Warders have made partnerships with disparate groups of Ravnos or Nosferatu “bottom-feeders,” but these alliances were temporary and ended up poorly for all parties involved. Experienced werewolves pass on one unalienable truth to their cubs: “Vampires lie.”

Most alliances the werewolves generate occur within their own tribes. While each tribe comes from different geographical regions and supports divergent philosophies, they still consider themselves to be part of one “nation.” They’re truly like a massive, extended family. They may fight among themselves, but the moment a threat from outside is detected, the man-wolves put aside differences and mobilize for battle. Once the common enemy is vanquished and the caern is saved (or whatever the case may be), they resume their internal clanish hostility. It’s even possible, given a great common enemy (such as an ancient Cainite crawling out of slumber), that even the most divergent of groups such as the Warders and Red Talons could manage an (exceptionally brief) alliance.

## Mages

Mages tend to be a more academic lot (even if academia hasn’t yet taken a firm hold on the populace of Europe) and as such tend to pursue alliances for different reasons than the other supernatural beings. Mages seek knowledge, anything to lend them greater power and control over their magics. With that in mind, they’re likely to ally with anyone who can offer them even a temporary taste of such wisdom. Their curiosity may drive them into some particularly unusual relationships. One cabal of Nicean necromancers has, for all intents and purposes, offered themselves as slaves to the Tremere chantry in Castellina. Their reasoning: Even as slaves they are capable of being closer to the secrets of death (and, appropriately, rebirth) than any of their brethren. They perform tasks bordering on the grotesque for the Tremere (grave-robbing, defiling holy sites, capturing and “inspecting” plague victims) just so they can feed off of the smallest scrap of information. Ulterior agendas exist in this partnering, however (a common element of alliances). In this case, the necromancers intend to destroy the Tremere chantry (and in their foolish minds, the entire clan of Usurers) once they have “gained enough knowledge.”

This is a time of religious discord. Crusades pit Christian against Muslim. Campaigns rage to oust



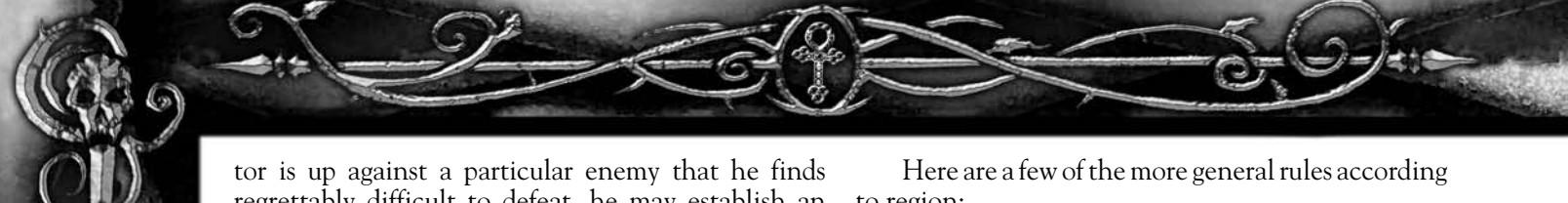
## COMMON ENEMY

The best reason for an alliance is probably a common enemy. As the saying goes, “the enemy of my enemy is my friend,” and in this dark period it’s never been more accurate. If a Faithful Cainite and a team of inquisitors stumble across a pack of werewolves serving some pagan “god,” and if for added value these man-wolves happen to occupy some much-desired terrain, well ... for the time being, it’s a good bet that the Cainite and the inquisitors are going to become reluctant allies. That’s not to say they’ll go out and drink pints of grog-and-blood afterward, nor does it even suggest that they’ll “band together” and oust the Lupines with fire and fury. The Cainite may offer the inquisitors information or an item of some religious importance, probably without ever revealing herself. Maybe the Cainite finds some much-needed funds and “family personnel” sent her way courtesy of the House of Murnau to help maintain the Christian *status quo*. Once the enemy is defeated, however, the inquisitors may discover that the “religious relic” was secretly cursed and the vampire finds that his new band of soldiers were also paid to stake him and leave him for the sunrise...

barbarians still clinging to “heathen” ideals. Many feud as Aristotelian, Augustinian and Platonic notions crowd each other for prominence. It is only natural for the mages (with such differing spiritual worldviews) to base many of their alliances upon the tenets of religion. Those mages of the Messianic Voices may form willing or unknowing allegiances with members of the Church. They may find that they’ve inadvertently partnered with the Lasombra, possibly even the Inquisition. Mages who bow down in chthonic temples to worship old gods or talk to the spirits are the most likely to find themselves on the same sides as the werewolves (see above). The faith of Islam might bring together the Ahl-i-Batin and any Cainite who believes Mohammed was truly God’s Prophet.

## Inquisitors

The Inquisition isn’t a liberal institution. It is rather hard and fast in its beliefs, and one of its key tenets is that monsters are utterly outside God’s plan. Hence, alliances with such beings are highly unlikely. That’s not to say impossible, however. Inquisitors, while part of a massive organization that thinks one specific way (i.e., anything supernatural is the Devil’s creation), are still individuals. As such, if the inqui-



tor is up against a particular enemy that he finds regrettably difficult to defeat, he may establish an alliance with another monster to help oust the bigger threat. In other words, an inquisitor may partner with the lesser of two evils to do God's dirty work in the Dark Medieval. These alliances, more than any other, are extremely temporary. Unless an inquisitor is particularly stealthy or is capable of keeping a single monster under his thumb permanently, the alliance vanishes like smoke in the wind once the common enemy is eliminated. Then the most the inquisitor will do is give his former ally a head start before tracking it down.

Internally, one expects that inquisitors have no problem allying with one another. They all support the greater religious architecture of the Church, which makes them siblings in the name of God. Inquisitors are not always on the same field of understanding, however, and may clash philosophical swords (if not real ones) over issues of law, heresy and punishment. After all, the wishes of the Pope can become a little muddled when he's 300 miles away in a world of practically no communication. Anytime even the tiniest element of Catholic doctrine and theological law becomes open to interpretation, inquisitors will be standing on both sides of the fence. Those with a Dominican mindset are likely to clash with those who favor a more Franciscan approach. Religion is an oft-disputed creature, and while in this age it's fairly unified, it's beginning to fracture — even inside the hallowed halls of the Inquisition.

## Inheritance

Power and wealth come with money, manpower and land. Few exist who don't covet power, and many will make great strides to obtain it. Some characters are forced to take power, but some have another option. For them, power can be achieved through educated patience. How can a character do this? Let those who have it die and inherit their power. Land, titles, wealth — even relationships and alliances all are passed down upon passing away, making inheritance one of the pillars of noble existence.

Unfortunately, the laws of inheritance are sticky, with a thousand and one ways around them. These laws vary wildly from region to region, with disparate qualifications for who truly receives titles and goods. On top of that, these laws aren't immutable. Should a new ruler enter power, the rules might change, hobbling some and giving newfound riches to others. In general, however, rules of inheritance remain constant less because of actual law and punishment and more because of common law and tradition.

Here are a few of the more general rules according to region:

**British Isles:** Inheritance in England and Ireland is handled via primogeniture — the passing down of land, wealth and titles to the first-born son. In England, belief in the blood is firm; royal blood is better than peasant's blood and carries down the "elite" traits of the father. These traits are suspected to be most significant in the first-born son, hence the laws of primogeniture. If no first-born son exists (or if for some reason the first-born son is proven to be a disreputable and unstable individual — and children can be disowned under English law), the titles and wealth pass along to the closest blood relation to the deceased; if only a daughter is available, the power is passed along to whomever she marries. In Scotland, titles are handed down from father to first-son as well, but all in the context of the clans (and should a clanmate disagree, he can take it up with the elders). In Wales, land and goods are divided up equally between surviving sons, with disagreements going through local princes.

**France:** France is one of the few places in Europe where women have equal right to land inheritance as men. Daughters and sons are considered equal in regard to the transfer of acreage and monetary wealth. Women are capable of owning their own land, regardless of marriage, which gives women of both the high aristocracy and low nobility significantly more power than they'd have in other parts of the world. In fact, two types of inheritance are prevalent in France: paternal and maternal. In other words, one can receive land and monies from both sides of her family.

Some rather unusual inheritance laws exist in France, however. One of these was concocted by the Church: If the land being passed was a fiefdom worked by vassals, a "concessionary" fee must be paid to the Church. If this fee is not paid, the Church can demand to use any (or all) of the vassals for military service in its name (i.e., for the Crusades). The Church is also known to visit dying nobles and prey upon their fear of Hell in order to ensure that their last confessions are accompanied by gifts of land.

**Holy Roman Empire:** With the power in the Holy Roman Empire slowly drifting from a central body to one focusing on the whims of individual territorial rulers, the concept of inheritance is growing uncertain. Before now, the law was simple. One inherited through primogeniture and paid heavy taxes to the Empire and the Church. All oaths and contracts were firmly passed to the inheritor, thus maintaining the crucial feudal contract.

Emperor Frederick II has sowed seeds of dissension against the Church. He was excommunicated once due to failing the Fifth Crusade but was allowed

grace when he returned to finish the job. Lately, though, Frederick has been going outside the “natural order” of things. He’s beginning to strengthen his holdings and power in the Sicilian domains in preparation for a struggle versus the Lombards. This is causing conflict between Frederick and his son Henry. Frederick has opted to find ways to maneuver Henry out of the loop, despite Henry being of the representative opinion of the Germanic princes. Frederick seeks to cheat Henry of any and all inheritance and intends to depose and imprison his son at the slightest hint of rebellion. He has also broken all compacts, has left Germany with little authority and has given the Italian princes and landowners massive amounts of independent power. Frederick alone is forcing members of the Holy Roman Empire to question the feudal contract. Could the cornerstone of medieval society be crumbling?

**Iberia:** Islamic influence is waning in the Iberian Peninsula at this time, but in some areas the Islamic laws of inheritance still hold (see Outremer, below, for more information). Primarily, it’s a standard case of sons inheriting from their parents, with a strict delineation ruling out women. The instability of the region at the time demands a “flexible” inheritance system, and often the right bribe or deed can grant any character access to at least part of a dead man’s property.

One of the more interesting elements of inheritance in Iberia is due to the Reconquista. Because the monarchs are eager to “Christianize” the whole area, they give out *mercedes* (rewards) to any military leaders who aid in the cause. These *mercedes* often come in the form of land and hereditary titles, which are so common it’s ridiculous. These rewards are less about being passed down and more about being granted or stolen. Everyone ends up with a title, and it’s not yet certain whether the land and monies will hold up once a man dies.

**Italy:** The inheritance laws of Italy are somewhat strange. Titles pass down to the first-born legitimate son, but the passing along of land is an odd assortment of fractions that allow for both legitimate and bastard sons (referred to in the local inheritance laws, also called the Law of Rothari, as “natural” sons) to obtain some part of the land and wealth. While the rules are complex, it ultimately boils down to this: The legitimate sons split two thirds of the land (of their choosing), where the “natural” (or illegitimate) sons split the remaining third. No concessions exist for daughters.

**Hungary/Byzantine States:** In these areas, land is considered less the property of an individual and more the possession of the extended family (known as the Law of Kindred). One of the primary passages of land and wealth occurs through the lines of *married* daughters, essentially passing to the couple through the maternal

line and not the paternal. Nobles find ways around these laws, however, and the secondary method of inheritance in this region is that accorded by *treaty*. Many treaties specify inheritance outside the family, and these treaties extend to those all over Europe. This is how members of the English nobility manage to maintain land and wealth in the Byzantine realm.

**Scandinavia:** Two forms of inheritance exist in the realm of Scandinavia — primogeniture and *gavelkind*. *Gavelkind* was the original practice of inheritance until the 10th century, forged by the Vikings who lived there. The process was simple: divide up the land and wealth among all the children (son or daughter, legitimate or bastard) and pass the title to the eldest-born. Since families were large, greedy nobles noticed that land was parceled out into smaller and smaller chunks. Since land means wealth (coming from taxes, agriculture, status), they wanted all they could get. When Louis the Pious received a piece of the Carolingian Empire from Charlemagne in the ninth century, he began instituting the policy of primogeniture to replace *gavelkind*. *Gavelkind* is on its way out but is still practiced by those not under the scrutiny of the higher-ups, especially in smaller towns and regions.

## ALLIANCE AND INHERITANCE: THE POLITICAL MARRIAGE

The wisest of nobles in the Dark Medieval know that to maximize their holdings, they must ally with those who can grant them the strongest power. Hence, the institution of the political marriage. Marriage among nobles is rarely done for romantic reasons. Ideas of courtly love are well and good, but marrying a scullery maid isn’t going to gain a character that sweet fiefdom he was looking for. Male nobles seek to marry the daughters of important men or the rare widow who owns her own land. Thus, the marriage not only grants immediate power, but when the daughter’s father passes away, the husband is likely to see the bulk of the inheritance (provided that daughter has no key brothers, and if she does, the noble may choose to make bloody work of them).

This isn’t to say women don’t gain any advantage through the process of the marriage; quite the contrary. First, they are afforded security that a single woman or widow simply doesn’t have. Second, marrying a strong noble may be the only way they will see any inheritance. In many regions, daughters don’t receive *anything* unless they’re married. Overall, the political marriage is advantageous for all, unless one partners with a penniless or disfavored noble.

**Outremer:** The land called Outremer is dominated by Islamic culture despite the surge in Christian numbers due to the Crusades. As such, the Qur'an dictates the inheritance procedures of the area. The book states that "men shall have a share in what parents and kinfolk leave behind, and women shall have a share in what parents and kinfolk left behind." Women are allowed to inherit from their fathers and mothers, but the unfortunate truth for them is that their share of the inheritance often constitutes little more than metaphorical table-scrapes. Beyond that, interpretation of the Islamic code is left up to local clerics to decide. Some rules are hard and fast (illegitimate children shall inherit nothing, non-Muslims inherit nothing), and others are less so. The clerics determine "rules of priority" in figuring out which male children deserve the greatest portions of land, holdings and goods.

Outside of Islam, European inheritance laws have come piggy-backing along with the massive influx of Crusaders and merchants, and so very few laws of inheritance are fixed. The French uphold their style of inheritance, and the English do much the same. In some cities (Acre, for instance), the writ of the Holy Roman Empire rules, which translates into "Primogeniture with taxes levied by the Church."

## Mother Church

The catch to the issue of inheritance is that the Church may become involved. Once the Church is involved, everything changes. For one, it can deny all or parts of inheritance, intercepting the claim (land, wealth, what-have-you) for its own benefit (or God's). The Church's usual course of action is often more insidious, however. Members of the Church can blackmail a potential inheritor. A bishop can say to the son of a deceased baron, "Please donate an acre of your land to the Church, an acre of your land to the King, and you must take a wife of my choosing." The baron is then aware (unless he is an ignorant or stubborn sot) that disobeying this bishop's "suggestion" will ultimately have him lose the whole of his inheritance. So the baron (wisely) gives in to the bishop, letting the leeches of Mother Church have their share of blood. A good rule of thumb is this: If the Church wants it, the Church can take it.

## Blood for Blood

Inheritance can lead to quick betrayal. If the only son of a prominent earl wishes to earn both the title and the fiefdom, he may have his father assassinated. If multiple sons are forced to split the bounty of the father, they may begin killing one another in a gory circle of familial treachery. Sometimes this treachery comes in

the form of murder, and other times it may take subtler forms. A successor to title and land may discredit his brothers (or in some regions may claim that they were bastards and not legitimate children). He may even seek to convince others that they're criminals (or worse, madmen) and have the siblings locked up in some tower or dungeon. (For an excellent look at the way this betrayal can play out, read or watch Shakespeare's *Richard III*.) The royalty and nobility of the Dark Medieval are a bitter, murderous lot. The higher-ups can give the most perfidious Cainite a run for her money when it comes to betrayal.

## Oaths and Compacts

Wealth and titles aren't the only thing that are passed down. Written and unwritten alliances are also passed down upon the deaths of those who held them. Sometimes oaths made by a noble are passed on when he dies. Any compacts that the deceased may have made in times of war will also be passed along to the inheritor, meaning that he must uphold whatever alliances were forged by the departed. Any vassals or knights (or any military servicemen) must pay homage to the inheritor, but this goes both ways; the inheritor must swear fealty to the lord of the deceased as well. The Dark Medieval has a distinct barking chain. Just because a character moves up the social ladder doesn't mean that she's not still a dog.

Still, any alliances passed along could make the inheritor a very powerful person. His influence increases, his relationships grow. If the inheritor is perceived as weak (or simply not worthy of the bestowed oaths), another may attempt to assassinate or weaken him.

## Court Intrigue

The simplest way to gain authority and wealth is to convince someone who already has them to bestow them, but potential benefactors are few in number. One who desires funds, land or political clout has few places to turn save the nobility or the Church, and the Church is unlikely in the extreme to grant them. On the other hand, most of the rich and powerful won't easily part with even a small portion of their worth. They require substantial convincing to share what they have — but it can be done.

In a feudal society, the nobility claims most of the power, and only those with a voice at court have a chance of taking it from them. All nobles, from kings and princes to landed gentry with a single large estate, need to meet with other nobles, emissaries of other lands and provinces, local merchants, churchmen and — occasionally — even representatives of the peasantry. Some lords hold open courts in which anyone who wishes to speak may enter; others are open only to those with sufficient power that the lord cannot risk alienating

## BLOOD RIGHTS OF BEASTS

Inheritance doesn't necessarily apply to the supernatural dwellers of the Dark Medieval. Cainites are a stone's throw from immortal. Vampires don't intend to suffer Final Death, and very few concessions are in place allowing the childer of a vampire to gain anything at all. Some Ventre and Lasombra act in accordance with mortal inheritance laws. Some sires draw up wills allowing their childer to share their holdings, but few do this, because it gives the childer a reason to conspire and destroy their patron as soon as the wax seal hits the parchment (though the blood oath reduces some of the risk.) Other clans practice a more familial inheritance. The Ravnos, for instance, are often known to disseminate their worldly goods (they rarely possess land) among coteries, and for the most part this works without betrayal or murder.

Werewolves have children and families (some of which may or may not be Garou themselves), but they don't ultimately hold much actual land or wealth. Much of what they gain is transitive. They have more important things to worry about than who holds what land. Tribally speaking, they claim right to the land that supports their caerns, but no one strictly "owns" that, so it doesn't count among the accord of inheritance. Some tribes still operate according to the mortal laws of inheritance. The Silver Fangs, for one, are so immersed in their mortal *and* Garou nobility that they consider it a crime to go against the orders of inheritance. Metis are unlikely ever to inherit a damn thing, and only some Garou (Silver Fangs included) would ever consider purely mortal children worthy of any temporal wealth that may potentially be passed along. Many times, minor fetishes and possessions are burned or buried with the owner, unless she specifically stated that they should be passed on. Powerful items — such as klaives — might be

passed down to a descendant or might simply be guarded until a worthy owner is found.

Mages are a disparate lot, so it's hard to say where their laws on inheritance lie. They are mortal and move in the mortal realm. Some still lose and gain land and power according to the region's inheritance laws. Others pass down internal titles and wealth to desirous members of their chantries. Some, such as those who work in accord with the Messianic Voices, often ensure that anything they have obtained in the material world goes to the Church upon their deaths.

In the Church, the Inquisition tends to hold similar policies. Anything that inquisitors have is technically not their own; the Church can lay claim to it at any time, and often will upon death. Few inquisitors have interest in material wealth, as quite a few come from the monastic orders (Dominican and Franciscan, primarily) and generally oppose material goods. (Some bishops, pontiffs, cardinals, etc. still accrue wealth and land through their mortal lives, as there's nothing stopping greed from affecting Church members just *because* they're Church members.) Titles are earned, not passed down, so that's nary a concern among the Inquisition. Things are slightly different among the Murnau and the Oculi Dei. The Murnau are something of a "family business," and aren't specifically clergy. The family tends to follow the principles of primogeniture, giving all inheritance to the eldest son (or son-in-law, if that is the only option). As the family is one filled with devious bureaucrats, sometimes other deals are struck within the organization. The Oculi Dei (also not clergy) operates in a wholly different manner. This group maintains hoards of varying size across Europe, and when a member dies, his holdings and relics are placed in one of these caches and stay there for "future use."

them. The first, obviously, is easier for characters to access than the second, but neither is completely closed to the resourceful.

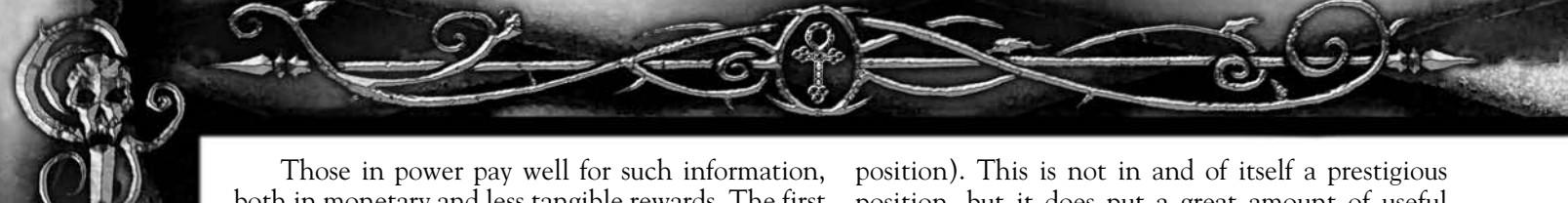
### Making Oneself Useful

The most straightforward and most common method of gaining a noble's favor is by performing services, doing favors or otherwise being useful to have around. Most wise rulers reward those who assist them, for fear of losing that assistance — or having it turned to the service of their enemies.

If this were a simple matter, though, anyone could do it. One cannot simply walk into court and announce, "Greetings, my lord! I am useful to you. Reward me." So how to go about it?

### Providing Intelligence

Many Cainites, Garou, mages and inquisitors have means of obtaining information unavailable to ordinary mortals. Spirits whisper secrets to those with the means to listen. Canine ears hear the softest voices, even through thick walls. A messenger's very thoughts can betray him to those who can read minds. Even characters who possess none of these abilities might have connections with someone who does. Many of these "monsters" — Cainites in particular — pride themselves on their webs of favor and influence that extend through many regions. If they truly wish to gather intelligence on a mortal noble — say, for instance, an enemy of the lord with whom they are seeking favor — precious little can be done to stop them.



Those in power pay well for such information, both in monetary and less tangible rewards. The first few reports prove one's usefulness and reliability. After sufficient time has passed, after one's espionage has saved one's lord from an invasion or an assassination, the lord may become fully dependent on his informant above all other sources of intelligence. Once this has occurred, he can no longer afford to refuse any but the most outrageous demands of the character assisting him. Money, lands, power and favors are ripe for the asking.

A truly ambitious character might provide intelligence to two rival lords, informing each of the other's plans. Because this provides a steady stream of useful intelligence for both parties, it all but guarantees a swift rise in both lords' estimation. Then again, should either lord ever discover what the character is doing, not only will all rewards and favors be revoked, one can expect to have gained at least one, and possibly two, powerful and angry enemies. The Nosferatu Edwyd, for instance, is the childe of Richard de Worde, the spymaster of the Ventre Mithras, Cainite Prince of London. Edwyd, both on his own and through ghoul agents, provided information to King Henry III's court about the King's rebellious brother, the Earl of Cornwall — and then warned the Earl of the King's knowledge of his activities, beginning the cycle anew. This went on sporadically for some years, until Richard de Worde put a stop to it at Mithras' behest. While Edwyd is watched carefully, rumor has it that his agents still offer both money and boons for information on the hidden activities of the nobles of the British Isles.

#### Performing Mundane Services

It doesn't require supernatural abilities or spectral informants to gain a lord's favor; normal mortals do so on a regular basis. All one really needs is some form of expertise, skills or connections the noble can use. Cainites tend to be less effective than others in these roles, which invariably require daylight activity. A loyal ghoul, however, can prove almost as effective as being there oneself.

Military expertise, while always in demand, is not the best avenue to take when attempting to gain a lord's favor. Many nobles have the unreasonable expectation that their military advisors and generals actually take the field of battle and lead the armies directly. This means that one will likely have little time to build one's power and influence at court, as one is busy dodging swords and arrows.

Someone particularly skilled at juggling numbers and managing ledgers might attempt to become an advisor to the lord on matters of taxes and finance (ordinarily this is the seneschal's job, but with a bit of skillful manipulation the character could usurp that

position). This is not in and of itself a prestigious position, but it does put a great amount of useful information at one's fingertips, to say nothing of the opportunities to abscond with as much of the lord's wealth as one can embezzle.

Bodyguards are always in demand, and it is here that one with the abilities of a mage, werewolf or inquisitor can truly shine. A bodyguard is expected to go everywhere her lord does, granting her tacit permission to eavesdrop on official meetings and court appearances.

The character who wants to earn a lord's trust quickly might even arrange an assassination attempt on her charge, one that she can thwart, thus "proving" her loyalty and ability both. Many lords confide in and discuss politics with their bodyguards — after all, the guard already knows what's happening from the aforementioned meetings — and a clever character can begin influencing her lord's decisions within just a few months.

Sometimes it's wiser to build one's power base outside the halls of the nobility first, so that one can then negotiate from a better position. Nearly as powerful as the lord of a given region is the Church. Priests speak with the voice of God and the Vatican, many of them manage riches enough to make any noble drool, they can steer the course of public opinion like a cowherd, and some even wield the ultimate weapon of excommunication. If one has or can obtain authority in the Church — or can suborn someone who has it — one has the clout to demand that any lord listen to what one has to say.

The same holds true of those who claim power in merchants' associations. Though true guilds are still a foreign concept throughout most of the world, some merchants and craftsmen have banded together to make their voices heard. They are not yet powerful enough to force their rulers to behave properly, but they can at least demand an audience on major issues. Some wise lords realize they are better off working with their craftsmen than against them, and pay heed to what these organizations have to say.

#### Funds and Manpower

Another approach that requires one already possess some power before one can obtain more is still very much worth considering. Nobles are sometimes forced to borrow funds from others in order to maintain their armies and their lands. Because most titles are hereditary, even the richest merchants can never rise to the nobility. If the characters have money but no authority, that money can be parlayed into a voice at court. A noble who has indebted himself to the character must pay at least some heed to that character's wishes, or else he risks having his debts called in.

Finally, some in the Dark Medieval command the loyalty of many fighting men yet lack any formal title or authority. Mercenary leaders, rich merchants with veri-

## THE GILDED CAGE

Although written for *Vampire: The Masquerade* and set centuries after the Dark Ages era, *The Gilded Cage* is a valuable resource for players and Storytellers interested in learning more about how to subvert large organizations from the servants upward. While the book directly addresses modern governments and corporations, the strategies and tactics enumerated therein can be modified for the courts of the Dark Medieval with surprisingly little effort.

table armies of caravan guards and religious leaders surrounded by fanatic cultists can make or break a lord's own military might. If one has such a private army, one can offer one's services to the nobility in exchange for substantial favors. This works best with militarily weak lords, but even those with a substantial army are often interested in finding other people to do their fighting for them.

### Suborning the Servants

One need not have any direct contact with one's lord in order to manipulate his actions. The pages, scribes and servants of the courts provide all the tools one could ever desire.

The upper classes learn from infancy to ignore the servants around them. It's improper even to notice the woman pouring the wine at dinner, or the old man standing beside the throne in case his lord desires any refreshment while receiving petitioners. The chambermaids know full well when the married baron has a pretty young peasant brought to his study, and the valet knows that the emissary of the neighboring kingdom—the one who supposedly disappeared before arriving — was in fact strangled in his sleep after the master welcomed him in. The servants within a castle, fortress or manor are privy to untold numbers of secrets, and while most of them are sufficiently uneducated that they don't recognize the import of what they hear (or, just as often, they do understand but are too cowed or polite to use that information), they're more than capable of repeating them to characters with espionage, extortion or blackmail on their minds.

Most nobles cannot be bothered to keep track of their own schedules; that's what advisors are for. If one wishes to see the lord at all, one must convince the seneschal that one's purpose is worthwhile. The character who holds sway over a lord's advisor, then, decides who will be allowed to meet with the lord and who will not. This influence can be parlayed into a large web of debts. If one has suborned a royal messenger, one can even manipulate the information the lord receives, altering it just enough to make him behave in a manner more befitting one's goals. Men have been promoted or

condemned, entire wars averted or ignited by the alteration of a few words of text. Throughout Europe exists a thriving black market for convincing forgeries of royal seals. Rumor has it that a small band of inquisitors of the Oculus Dei is behind the operation; possession of "royal documents" granting them permission to act where and how they wish would cut through substantial bureaucratic and legal obstacles that even the authority of the Church cannot penetrate.

Suborning the servants of a lord is rarely difficult. Many of them have committed various indiscretions—embezzlement, theft, association with those who would bring shame on their lord's family, unacceptable sexual or religious practices—that can be exploited by characters with the resources to unearth them. Others are susceptible to monetary enticements. Most servants hail from the lower classes and are forced to work every day in the midst of riches far beyond any they can hope to achieve themselves. Envy breeds greed and resentment, and all but the most loyal servants can be bribed into revealing their masters' secrets.

### Direct Supernatural Influence

The methods described above are optimal because, while some of them make incidental use of various supernatural abilities, they don't rely on those abilities to control or manipulate the noble in question directly. Such direct manipulation isn't recommended. Powers and abilities are too unreliable, too easily detected by those who know what to look for and too short-lived—and anyway, not every character has access to these abilities.

Sometimes one requires one's pawns to take actions they cannot be persuaded to attempt in any other fashion, or else more subtle methods prove too slow to execute. In these instances, supernatural means of compulsion may be one's only viable option.

#### Mind Control

The most obvious technique is also the least effective, and that is the direct control of the subject through supernatural compulsion. Vampiric Disciplines such as Dominate or Presence, the Hermetic Pillar of Corona—these and more provide means of directing living (or unliving) people like marionettes. Unfortunately, as mentioned above, these abilities rarely last long, and strong-willed individuals are capable of resisting them. Only if all other options have failed should one attempt direct control over a lord or noble.

Other, longer-lasting means exist; the most well known of these is the vitae-engendered blood oath of the Cainites. While more reliable (and thus safer) than other powers, the blood oath still requires effort to maintain, can be detected or at least inferred by those who know of its existence and—most worrying of all—can be overcome or broken under the proper circumstances. Again, far better for all concerned if such

heavy-handed methods can be avoided except where absolutely necessary.

### Offering Immortality

Many nobles have an unreasoning fear of death. Some are reluctant to give up their wealth and status; others are painfully aware that they have attained and maintained their positions through means that will almost assuredly land them someplace hot and unpleasant in the afterlife. Creatures capable of offering these nobles long life or immortality can almost certainly demand any and everything in the noble's power in exchange.

Cainites, of course, are capable of following through on this promise, at least to some extent. Lupines, mages and inquisitors are less able to offer a draught from the cup of eternal life (although various magical Pillars are certainly capable of extending a mortal's lifespan). Still, witches and werewolves don't have to be able to grant immortality; as long as they possess sufficient power to convince their pawn that they can do so, they can maintain the charade, and thus the arrangement with the lord in question, for years on end.

### Messengers of God and Satan

In the atmosphere of religious fear and fanaticism maintained by the Catholic Church and the Crusades of the Dark Medieval world, it's child's play for a clever character with access to even the most moderately

impressive powers to portray himself as a messenger of the lord—or perhaps of other, less noble entities. A lord who can be convinced that he does God's bidding by doing the character's bidding, or who believes that he will be rewarded with infernal boons for doing the same, will commit all sorts of atrocities in the name of a higher (or lower) power. As long as one is smart enough to concoct believable reasons for the lord's reward to be put off indefinitely—perhaps it awaits him in the next life—an arrangement of this sort can continue for years or even decades.

This deception, if discovered, is almost guaranteed to attract the attention of the Inquisition, and those who would attempt it are strongly encouraged to have several contingency plans in place ahead of time.

## Aftermath

It's all over. Whether it took a volley of arrows and the clash of swords, or a cup of poisoned mead and the patience to inherit, it's done. The territory has changed hands. The domain has been taken, its spoils plundered. The question becomes, now what? Each supernatural group in the Dark Medieval is likely to use the bounty to different ends. While none of this is chiseled in stone, it's a reasonable guide to what might happen when it's all said and done.



## Vampires

When a coterie captures and holds a domain, it gives them access to two things: blood and power. A territory gained means authority. Authority means wealth, control over whatever it produces (probably agricultural) and command over all who work the fiefdom. Vassals can mean many things — for one, they provide work. They provide more vassals (in the form of children). They provide a standing army that can be called upon whenever there is a need. But for Cainites, vassals also mean blood. Blood is difficult to acquire in the Dark Medieval. Rogue coteries of the Low Clans often have to survive hand-to-mouth every night, with no certainty as to where their next mouthful of blood comes from. More often than not they end drinking from lepers and madmen who wander the muddy streets at midnight. Should a coterie manage some piece of a territory, the pickings become better. A Cainite can handpick a servile group, Dominate them or subject them to the blood oath, all in the relative safety of his own domain. Plus, should a group of vampires somehow wrest control of an area away from a werewolf or mage (i.e., a magical site such as a caern or chantry), they then have options. While holding a magical territory doesn't necessarily mean blood (unless a coterie wants to risk drinking the blood of other supernatural creatures), it may mean power in the form of magical items, spiritual weapons or holy relics. Any cunning Cainite can sell these items off to the highest bidder or use them as a bargaining chip in a future pact or alliance.

## Inquisitors

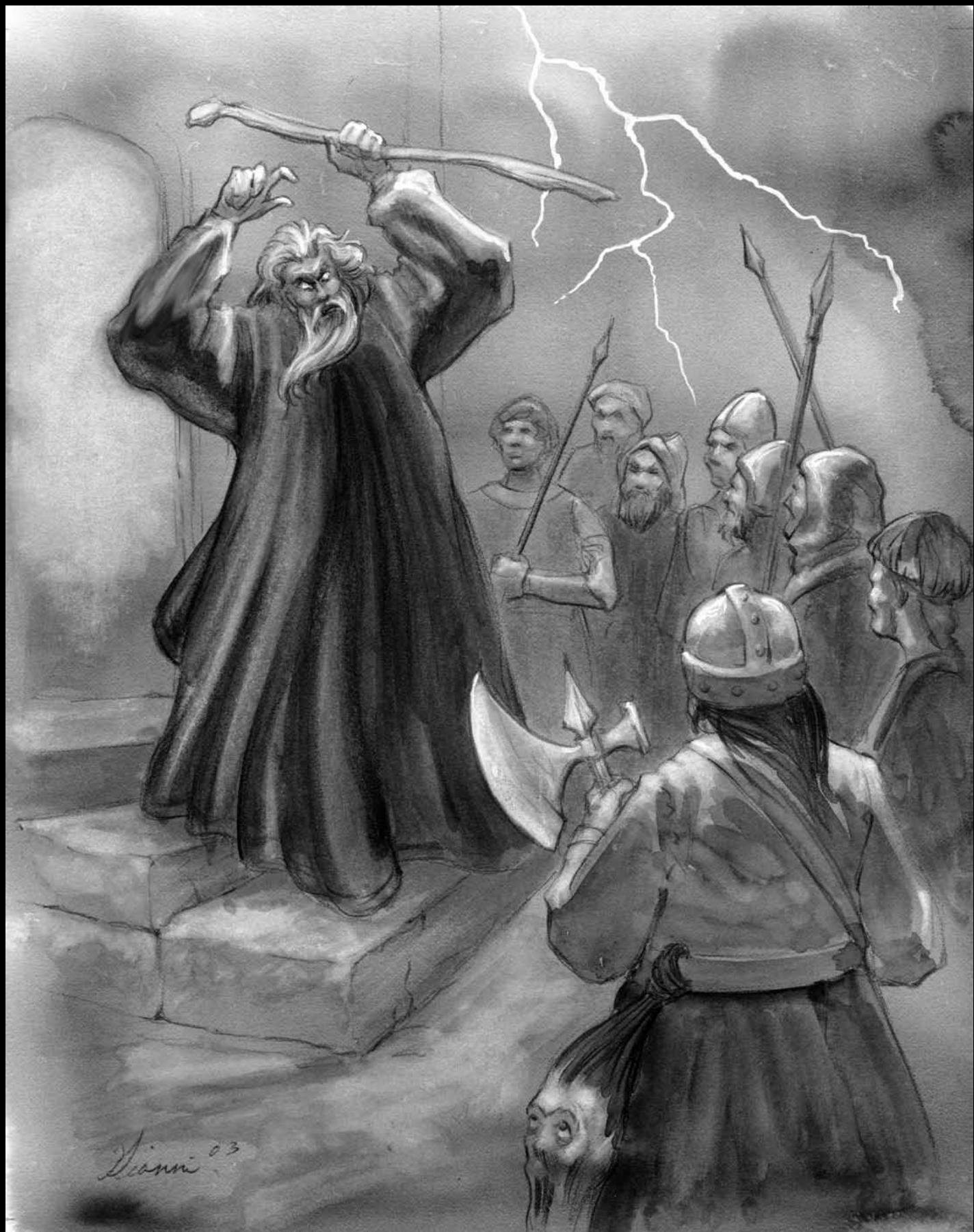
Satan has much territory in the Dark Medieval, turning lands to his blasphemous purposes much as the Mother Church makes places holy for her children. Once the Adversary is overturned in an area by the shadow Inquisition, the spoils of that area often go to Mother Church. The domain's wealth is turned into the Church's wealth, and sometimes a territory is cleaned, blessed and made "holy" by the building of a new church or cathedral (especially true in the rare instance that a cell or a group of cells overtakes a place of power such as a werewolf caern). Another thing that inquisitors look for after they've razed the buildings and destroyed the heretics is the presence of holy relics. Some relics are all too common in the Dark Medieval (every Pardoner wields a sack full of "splinters of the True Cross"), but from time to time inquisitors come across authentic relics. (Examples of these might be the Turin Shroud, the skeleton of St. Benedict or Christ's swaddling clothes.) A cell may take a territory solely on the rumored presence of relics.

## Werewolves

The Garou generally aren't interested in the power-mongering of the mortal world. It just doesn't serve their needs. (That's not to say it's impossible, however. Ryn Ap Bleidd, a Welsh Fianna, went about with his pack and took domains away from corrupt families and delivered them into the hands of those who they felt "deserved" them.) If a pack of Garou (or multiple packs) claims a domain, what is it going to do with it? Staying behind and claiming it as their own is likely to invite the Inquisition's holy justice. The wolves might take what needs taking (goods, weapons, clothing) and move along, leaving the razed village burning in their wake. If anything, they'll leave an area destroyed as an example to whomever they were "speaking to" in the first place. Some Garou might take and hold a domain for their own personal puissance. The Warders of Men and Silver Fangs place more focus on mortal authority and material power than other werewolves. They often claim manors at the edges of their territory where they may control the domain without interacting too deeply with its inhabitants and vassals.

## Mages

It is uncommon for mages to become embroiled in petty land disputes or battles if nothing something specific and worthy is to be gained at the end. If it's domain, then something about the land or the structures upon the land speaks to some sought-after magical integrity. Two things might occur after mages take domain. They either keep it and build a chantry upon it to help "harvest" the energy that comes from there (whether it's considered holy ground, the nexus of ancient pagan energies or an expression of Europe's own soul is different for every group of wizards), or they will reap the land of its power and move on their way. The latter is the most common. After all, mages can't afford to make themselves too public. Staying on conquered ground is like putting up a white flag in the darkness and calling to your enemies. However, instances occur of mages finding and keeping a domain. A group of Valdaermen believed they found the subterranean cavern where Loki was said to be imprisoned. They ousted a small brood of Nosferatu from the cavern and claimed it as their own, battling off the Cainites who claimed the cave as their "warren." Here the Valdaermen perform ghastly sacrifices to Loki, praying that he will wake and deliver the burgeoning Christians into the crushing hands of the elder Norse gods.



# CHAPTER THREE: PREPARING FOR BATTLE

The march begins. Out in front are the scouts and incendiaries. After them come the foragers whose job is to collect the spoils and carry them in the great baggage train. Soon all is in tumult.... The incendiaries set the villages on fire and the foragers visit and sack them. The terrified inhabitants are either burned or led away with their hands tied behind their backs to be held for ransom. Everywhere bells ring the alarm; a surge of fear sweeps over the countryside. Wherever you look you can see helmets glinting in the sun, pennons waiving in the breeze, the whole plain covered with horsemen. Money, cattle, mules and sheep are all seized. The smoke billows, flames crackle. Peasants and shepherds scatter in all directions.

— *Chanson des Lorriens* (c. 1213)





A medieval army on the march is a fearsome thing. Thousands of soldiers, knights and camp followers spread across the defender's countryside in search of food, water, forage, plunder and ransom. What they cannot take, they burn. The defenders, falling back to their castles and cities, do the same, herding animals and belongings into cramped strongholds and leaving the countryside denuded of flocks, crops and people. The mere passage of an army is a potential famine as its clerks buy up supplies at wildly inflated prices.

The army is an unwieldy collection of component units that are proud and quarrelsome. The pennons in the breeze each mark a knight and his household, a city's militia or a mercenary band. Thrown together by a feudal lord's summons, the army is a shifting mass of rival strangers with few common tactics and little common training. Its units fight together for a few months then disperse, with many of its members still strangers to each other. Only crusading armies remain in the field as a whole for more than a season and have time to become a coordinated force.

## The Call to Arms

The army is the work of months of planning. To assemble the English royal army, for instance, sheriffs are dispatched to the royal vassals, commanding those who owe service to appear with their household troops at a certain date and time. Meanwhile, other sheriffs are busy purchasing supplies and arranging for transport. Royal administrators negotiate with landholders, the Church, and wealthy merchants for loans. Other clerks negotiate with mercenary captains and collect every available scrap of information about the region where the war is to be fought from pilgrims, merchants and immigrants. Northern France and the Holy Roman Empire follow similar patterns.

The royal vassals follow the same process. They in turn send messengers to their vassals, purchase supplies and arrange for bank loans. Often, they update their wills and make an extra effort to attend mass and confess their sins. Affairs are settled, then left in the hands of the landholders' wives and trusted seneschals.

Royal clerks set up the muster point and record the arrival and equipment of each landholder. How many soldiers and knights show up depends on the popularity of the king and of the royal cause. Soldiers serve for a variety of reasons. A short English campaign against Wales promises more swift and certain plunder than a years-long crusade to Outremer.

When a landholder needs to raise an army against his neighbor, the process is quicker. The messengers need only reach a few key vassals and bring them a short distance. Logistics are much simpler. Still, the number of knights and soldiers responding, and the speed of their response, depends on the landholder's popularity and the opportunity for profit.

The large counties of southern France rely not on feudal levies but on taxes and paid soldiers. The count's officers demand payment from their vassals, who send money or hire soldiers to serve for them. The northern Italian city-states likewise rely mostly on civic levies, paid soldiers and hired mercenaries. Their forces are better trained but serve only as long as they are well paid. Unpaid mercenaries may desert, change sides or merely fight with the bare minimum effort and abandon the field rather than take losses.

## Feudal Rights

Landholders owe military service to their feudal superiors. In northern Europe, this is a foundation of the government. Inquisitors, human-born werewolves and mages grow up as part of their society. Their customs and expectations mimic the society around them. Vampires, while they do grow up human, have their own systems of oaths and obligations to their actual or nominal superiors, which may be based on the centuries-old feudal system or on the customs of older societies like Rome or Greece.

Traditionally, a landholder owes 40 to 60 days per year military service with equipment and horses befitting his station. The wealthier the landholder, the more people and auxiliaries (archers, crossbow archers, peasant levies) he owes. A earl might have his own household force of 15 knights and as many as 70 knights with their own squires and soldiers. A simple knight might only have himself, a son as a squire and a few household soldiers. Bishops and abbots owe service as other landholders; they provide soldiers and knights based on the lands held by their churches.

Towns owe military service as part of their charters. A typical town might owe 20 to 100 soldiers. The town might provide its own militia of young men drawn from each neighborhood or parish. Wealthy towns might hire a company of professional soldiers if they have an interest in making sure the army does well.

The landholder's duty is complex. Since most of the obligations are oral, not written, a landholder who is not enthusiastic about a summons or whose lands

are restless or not faring well might show up with the smallest number of soldiers that is socially acceptable.

In some places, a landholder can send money to his feudal superior instead of going himself or sending his own men. This is a good idea for landholders who are widows, minors or otherwise not expected to lead troops in battle away from home. The custom (*scutage*) is gaining favor with some monarchs because it allows them to hire a better-trained, more cohesive body of troops. A landholder who does not serve in battle forfeits the potential gains in reputation, glory and plunder, however.

The feudal obligation is tied to holding physical territory. The demesne Backgrounds may include peasants, workers or city militia, with minimal equipment and training, who will fight obvious invaders to protect their homes. They are under the control of the local noble. A noble character has feudal duties appropriate to his station. Characters may also find that their allies, contacts or those who are part of their vassal Backgrounds (Flock, Kinfolk, Retainers, Servants) themselves have feudal duties and can be summoned to someone else's war at an inconvenient time.

Even wealthy merchant characters in the towns are not safe from military service. An urban character who defines his Resources as a merchant's wealth may have to pay unexpected taxes to support the city's militia or soldiers when called to war. He may be pressured to make a loan to a warlord or supply goods to the army at a cheap rate. Similarly, his allies, contacts or those who are part of his vassal Backgrounds may be conscripted as soldiers or tapped to provide resources for war.

## Beyond Duty: Motives for Fighting

The average human knight regards a summons to war with equal parts anticipation and terror. A war involves a vast opportunity for recognition, glory and plunder, and an opportunity for death, maiming or impoverishment. Most knights are young and blessed with the assurance of youth that they alone are immortal and that misfortune will happen to someone else. The truly immortal (or at least undying) and those blessed by other powers are often far more annoyed than eager for battle; most have a disdain for mortal affairs and an arrogance that their concerns are far more pressing than those of human warlords. The physical dangers of the battlefield are less worrisome

than the dangers of being publicly revealed as more-than-human.

So what would motivate any such character to go to war?

- **Duty.** Feudal obligation is the foundation of feudal armies. A character of knightly standing, a Captain of the People of an Italian republic or other landholder has little choice. His standing demands that he serve his landholder, regardless of the risk and inconvenience. That doesn't mean that he has to bring with him more than the barest socially acceptable number of troops, or serve for more than the mere 40 to 60 days owed by custom. Unless the warlord provides him with some other motive, he will serve his time and leave, hoping that he will not be gone so long that some other entity makes inroads on his demesne and resources.

- **Money.** Silver coin is a powerful motivator. A knight or soldier who is paid is expected to serve as long as the money flows. Wages for a soldier are similar to those for a skilled crafter working safely behind city walls. A werewolf, mage or inquisitor who lacks resources or land could do worse than make a living as a soldier and scout for an opportunity to move into some territory vacated by the death of its occupant. (A Cainite would find it nearly impossible to masquerade as a common soldier for long.) This is not always a wise plan. Pay is often late, especially if the campaign is not going well. Soldiers enrolling in extended campaigns in distant lands can demand half their pay up front, which might be given to the knight or soldier's family or allies to invest and form the basis of later Resources. Pay is distributed not to the soldiers but to their lord or captain by the royal marshal or noble's officer in charge of the army; the opportunities for an unscrupulous character to embezzle money or defraud his superior are legion.

- **Ransom.** A would-be warlord promises plunder and ransom. A captured knight is expected to ransom himself, his armor and his horse, which represents a large sum of money for his captor. Even groups of peasants can be held for ransom. Any supernatural character of even minor noble standing (or with a noble ally) stands a good chance of capturing human knights in battle. Their ransom can form the basis for later Resources. If a character is fortunate enough to capture the ally or vassal of another supernatural character, the ransom may be something more interesting than mere money. If ransom fails (though this is rarely a problem), such an unusual captive may provide useful information when interrogated. The

risks, of course, are that a supernatural character may be more interested in and capable of revenge for capturing or harming a vassal than a human noble is.

• **Pillage.** By convention, an invader can pillage a defending city or castle that refuses to surrender. The booty is piled together by the army and divided according to custom and as rewards for courageous service (in theory; in practice, it's really "first come, first served"). Supernatural beings look for different sorts of booty. Cainites primarily wish to plunder the holdings of their rivals whose homes are to be burned or destroyed during the pillaging. Inquisitors might wish to safeguard (or seize) holy relics in the defending city. Mages may search for rivals' laboratories and Quintessence. Werewolves may try to capture another sept's caern (or recapture a caern lost years or centuries ago), find fetishes or just wish some trophies of a Leech or other worthy foes for the next moot.

• **Renown.** Knights serve for glory—a chance to earn reputation and offices by deeds of arms. Medieval life is dull and hard. War is an opportunity for even the dullest peasant or least knight to save the day, win the battle and be noticed by the king or by God. War is exciting and addictive. It is a chance to exercise one's darkest impulses in the name of a righteous cause.

The quest for glory, even among mere mortals, may appeal to a werewolf as much as to any knight. While the army is busy with mortal soldiers, a werewolf may be attacking Leeches in their lairs or rival tribes—all far more worthy foes. Young knights make vows about how many prisoners they will take or how many knights they will kill (again, not unlike young werewolves at a moot). Knights argue, often bitterly, about who will have the honor of leading the first charge or attacking the most heavily defended position. Reputations are won and lost in troubadour's songs, tales around the camp fire and the chronicler's pen.

Crusaders take up the cross for faith. That same call can reach deeply into an inquisitor's heart. Crusaders lead armies at the behest of preaching friars and priests, who exhort them to travel great distances and free the Holy Land or smite the heretics of southern France and northern Italy. Crusading has a number of practical privileges, but these are secondary to the religious rewards of fighting for one's Church and God. No room exists for the moral quandaries that cloud daily life. "Kill them all," said a leader of the Albigensian Crusade, "God will know His own."

• **Pardon.** A warlord with legal authority can offer pardons to prisoners who serve as soldiers and knights. Those in political disgrace serve to regain favor. This may be a useful way for a character whose

## DRAWING FORCES TO A BANNER

A warlord can try to raise forces beyond those he is entitled to by feudal right by appealing to greed, vanity or faith. A player would roll Charisma + Commerce to simulate bargaining with mercenaries and soldiers over their wages. Charisma + Leadership promises glory, renown and wealth in battle, while Charisma + Expression promises heavenly rewards for serving the Church against pagans, heretics or foes who are the most vile of sinners. Manipulation can be used instead of Charisma if the character wishes to spread rumors of glory, renown or heavenly rewards instead of making direct promises.

The base difficulty is 6 for a short campaign that does not involve much travel. The difficulty increases the further the soldiers must travel from their homes. Raising additional forces in England for a crusade to Outremer, for example, may be difficulty 8 or even 9. The Storyteller may reduce the difficulty or give a player bonus dice if, for example, the enemy is a traditional foe and longstanding grievances are at work, or if similar campaigns in the past have been successful and lucrative.

The quality and number of additional troops are up to the Storyteller.

nature and loyalties are suspect to shore up his reputation in the mortal world and gain important allies and influence.

• **Demesne.** A warlord can offer lands and offices. After all, somebody has to garrison the areas captured by the army. The chance to rule (either directly or through a vassal) is a powerful motive for any character who wants to establish a demesne Background.

## Rebellion

Raising armies for offense or defense, when a warlord has the legal right to do so, is relatively easy. Raising armies against one's lawful sovereign is a different matter entirely. Raising a sword against one's lord is a betrayal of the fundamental tenants of knightly honor. No one wants to associate with a failed rebel. Few lords will support a known traitor while success is in doubt.

Treason is harshly punished. A traitor forfeits his land and often his life. Lords become fiendishly creative

in making an example of traitors. Traitors may be drawn and quartered, the torn bits of flesh sent to various cities to be displayed from the walls as examples. Rebellious peasant leaders can expect torture before execution. One count punished a rebellious peasant warlord by crowning him with a red hot iron coronet.

A rebel noble may, however, appeal to custom or law. If the lord acted dishonorably first, the rebel can mitigate his punishment. If the exact feudal relationship and duties are unclear, the rebel can claim he honestly believed he was acting honorably. If the rebel has powerful allies or strongly defended lands, he can try to reach a political agreement with his lord, although he is unlikely ever to be trusted again.

Rebellious townspeople or peasants are a different matter. Peasant uprisings occur sporadically, often in response to oppressive taxes or outrageous conduct by a landholder. Often, the peasant leaders delude themselves into thinking that if only the king knew of their plight, he would forgive them and set things right. Sadly, no monarch dares reward even a well-justified rebellion with forgiveness. The happy ending in which Robin Hood and his men are rewarded by King Richard for his loyal rebellion against King John is a peasant dream. A peasant rebellion inevitably ends in tragedy.

Vampires, werewolves and mages can easily find themselves drawn into a human rebellion, or themselves rebelling against their "lawful" superiors. Once a rebellion begins, it is likely a fight to the death. If the rebel can succeed, she may be able to defend her newfound position against rivals. With her foe deceased, the rebel can "prove" her rebellion justified with proof of heresy, treason, necromancy or worse, found in the deceased's home or tortured from the deceased's former allies.

## Ransom

Ransom is the best way for a knight to become wealthy during wars. A captured knight is expected to pay his captor a sum equal to the value of his armor and his horse, and suitable to his own worth. The actual amount is highly variable; a decent rule of thumb is one year's income from the prisoner's lands and offices. Ransom for a political enemy or rebel is much higher, perhaps 10 times the normal sum. A captor might even demand the surrender of key castles or holdings. Utterly refusing to accept ransom is rare, unless the captive is a heretic, traitor or non-Christian.

The captor holds the right of ransom. It can't be sold, inherited or stolen; the captor's superiors, however,



may claim a share in the ransom or a right to "buy out" the ransom of politically important prisoners.

The captive gives a promise to pay the ransom, backed by a promise of parole or oath of surrender. He is usually held as a prisoner until the ransom is paid, although kept in conditions according to his station. Keeping prisoners in harsh conditions to encourage the captive to pay as swiftly as possible might seem a viable strategy but is in fact a terrible breach of etiquette that almost assuredly results in recriminations later. For those willing to brave such consequences, however, captives can be denied medical treatment or tortured to speed their efforts to ransom themselves. A few captors threaten to hang their captives to induce their subject castles or towns to surrender.

The captive's vassals must aid in ransoming their lord as quickly as possible. This is one of the fundamental feudal obligations. The captive's lord may also help pay the vassal's ransom as a reward for faithful and honest service, but this is not required by feudal custom.

A knight risks his own capture and having to pay his own ransom. The sum could easily bankrupt a holding in a difficult year, particularly if the captive is on the defending side in a war and his own lands have been raided. When a knight realizes a battle is lost and capture imminent, he might try to disguise himself or lie about his identity.

Ransom is almost exclusively a noble's right. A group of peasants or a wealthy merchant might have enough money to make the effort worthwhile. Similarly, non-nobles cannot collect a ransom, but they can "sell" their captives to their lord or their employer, who can collect it.

The supernatural inhabitants of the Dark Medieval do not necessarily ransom their foes, especially dire enemies. If ransom is offered, it is rarely as simple as money. Captors might demand territory, knowledge, training in the captive's otherworldly powers or nearly anything else.

For simple monetary ransoms, a captive can raise the amount through Resources. A typical ransom would cost a Resource dot for a year. The captor temporarily gains Resources. The Storyteller should compare the captive's and captor's relative wealth and decide whether the ransom equals a full extra Resource dot or merely allows the captor to purchase a few luxuries he might otherwise not be able to afford.

If the captive cannot afford the ransom, he can look to allies, retainers or the surrounding lands for help. He can also try to raise more resources temporarily from his own lands (simulated by an Intelligence + Seneschal roll).

## The Crusader's Privileges

A character who makes a vow to take the Cross gains a number of pragmatic privileges and rights. In return, the Crusader promises to go on the long journey to Outremer and fight against the Muslims. The Papacy eventually extended the crusading idea to battles against enemies in Europe. When the Papacy offered Crusader privileges for shorter journeys — against heretics in southern France (1209–1255) and against its political enemies in Italy (Markward of Antweiler, (1199–1202)), many knights were enthusiastic volunteers. The ongoing campaign against Spanish Muslims and the upcoming Teutonic knights' campaign against Baltic pagans are popularly regarded as crusades, but they are not preached as such nor are those warriors offered the same privileges.

When someone takes the Cross, he literally sews a cross onto his clothing. The cross is worn from the moment he takes the vow until the crusade is complete. Acceptance of the sign of the cross marks a man in the service of Christ and signifies his moral and spiritual conversion. He has committed himself to a war that goes beyond the secular and temporal to be subsumed into the unending conflict between good and evil. Victory is spiritual, and its reward is eternal life.

Upon taking the cross, the Crusader receives a complete indulgence for all confessed prior sins. The indulgence is the main incentive for many Crusaders and the aspect most promoted by preachers. Even attending a sermon preaching a crusade is good for a remission of penance of 20 to 40 days.

Of course, one gains material rewards as well:

- The Crusader is placed under the Church's protection as if he had temporarily taken holy orders. The bishop or archbishop of the Crusader's diocese is responsible for enforcing this protection.

- The Crusader's financial resources are protected so that he can afford to go on crusade. If he owes debts, the payments are suspended and interest canceled. Often he is immune from taxes and tithes. His property is immune from seizure or lawsuit.

- The Crusader is protected from any legal punishment that involves death or mutilation. He is forbidden to engage in trial by combat. He may be able to choose whether to respond to a lawsuit in a civil court or an ecclesiastical court (as befitting someone under Church protection).

- The Crusader is protected from summons to his liege's court while preparing for departure and from having to respond while abroad.

If a Crusader reneges on his vow, the Church can excommunicate him. This recently happened to

Emperor Frederick II, although he is currently reconciled with the Pope. Generally, the Crusader has a year and a day from making the vow to depart, although some areas give him up to three years.

The Church also accepts a cash payment to redeem an ill-considered vow. The payment, as well as donations to support a crusade, is handled by the preachers authorized to preach the crusade and by accompanying Templar and Hospitaler knights. They in turn must account for the funds to the Papacy and to their orders.

Being a Crusader is neither a Merit nor a Flaw; the advantages and disadvantages balance out. Generally, it is easier for Cainites, mages and werewolves to gain the protections of a Crusader for their domains by having a retainer or Kinfolk who has legal title to the land take the oath than to try to go on crusade themselves.

## The Elements of the Army

Knights and sergeants are the heavy cavalry and infantry—the men in chain hauberks who lead charges into the enemy forces. Soldiers are the backbone of the army — while vitally important they are virtually ignored by their superiors, the troubadours and the chroniclers. Peasant levies and civil militias round out the infantry and are often used to build siege engines and set up camp. Camp followers are the noncombatants and range from carpenters and teamsters, to friars and priests, to merchants, laundry-women and prostitutes.

A character could be nearly any member of an army; a group of characters could be the knight and soldiers of a small household or the leadership of a mercenary band. Characters may also try to draw their vassal Backgrounds from military veterans.

### Knights and Sergeants

Knights are fully armored and equipped mounted soldiers. They are found in every country in Europe. Knights are distinguished by their social class and by their training to fight from horseback. Most knights hold enough land to support themselves and their war horses, and to pay for their armor and weapons.

Sergeants are, in a military sense, lesser knights. Socially, they are knights who hold slightly less land and are usually slightly less well equipped than a “knight.” They still use the “Sir” title and have the same rights and obligations as any other landed noble. An army usually has similar numbers of knights and sergeants, the exact ratio varying by battle and by country.

### TYPICAL EQUIPMENT

A knight typically has at least two dots in Resources. A sergeant typically has one dot in Resources. Knights typically have one or more dots in Retainers or a vassalage Background as well. (The four demesne Backgrounds are specific to their supernatural entities. A normal human knight’s land and territory is represented by his Resources.)

**Resources •:** A chain hauberk (Heavy Armor), often in poor repair, or ring mail (Composite Armor); a light helm; a broad sword; several lances or spears; a cavalry shield; a war horse. A knight may also have a common mace — a wooden club with metal studs on the head (treat as a Mace; see *Dark Ages Vampire* p. 248). Scale mail (Composite Armor) is possible but rare in Europe.

**Resources ••:** A chain hauberk (Heavy Armor); a light helm; a broad sword; several lances or spears; a cavalry shield; two war horses and a riding horse. A knight may also have a common mace. Generally he has a squire to care for his horses and armor.

**Resources •••:** A chain hauberk with leg guards (Knight’s Armor) or a chain hauberk (Heavy Armor); a light or heavy helm as appropriate to armor; a broad sword; several lances or spears; a cavalry shield; three or more war horses and a riding horse. A wealthy knight may also have a mace — a solid metal club with metal vanes or flanges (see p. 50). Generally he has one or more squires to care for his horses and armor as well as several soldiers.

**Resources •••• or more:** A chain hauberk with leg guards (Knight’s Armor); a heavy helm; broad sword, bastard sword or great sword; several lances or spears; a cavalry shield; multiple war horses and riding horses. A wealthy knight may also have a mace. Generally he has multiple lesser knights, squires and soldiers to assist him.

A hand ax, similar to the Frankish *francisca*, can be substituted for the broadsword but would be uncommon. The Danish two-handed ax is also uncommon because the user must give up his shield. Few knights trust that much to their mail, but someone with supernatural defenses may feel differently. (See Atypical Equipment, p. 50.)

A Cainite can, with difficulty, be a knight or sergeant. The Ashen Knight discusses some of the obstacles. On campaign, a knight would be expected to ride, during the day, with the army and to lead his troops into daylight battles.

The Poor Knights of Acre and male members of the Murnau family (those who do not join the clergy) are, by definition, knights or at least sergeants. Other inquisitors may have been knights before they took their holy orders.

Mages of the appropriate social backgrounds can be knights. Their magic can make them exceptionally powerful on the field, but they are still expected to lead troops, wear armor and make charges.

Werewolves often make poor knights, unless they have the Gifts to soothe horses and other domestic animals. A werewolf knight also needs enough control of his Rage to avoid frenzying in the midst of a battlefield and panicking his own troops, not to mention ruining his expensive armor in the process.

## Mercenaries

Mercenaries are men (and some disguised women) who decide to escape poverty, overpopulation, starvation and chaos by joining or forming mercenary groups. Their training and experience vary widely. It is rare for their leaders to come from a knightly background, but some are landless knights or sons who have no chance of inheriting. A mercenary leader can be knighted for loyal service, taken into a major household as a household knight or given an office and entrusted with an important garrison.

Most mercenaries are organized into small companies of up to 300 soldiers. They usually come from overpopulated areas with poor soil, particularly areas prone to weak leadership and frequent struggles. Many come from Brabant (France), Flanders (France), Hainault (France), Provence (France/Holy Roman Empire) and the Pyrenees Mountains (France/Spain).

Mercenaries are extremely unpopular with knights, urban dwellers and the populace. Mercenaries who break away from "official" command and begin ravaging the countryside are a frequent menace. The Third Lateran Council (1179) denounced these wandering mercenaries (*coteraux*, from *cultellus* [knife], or *routiers*). Their unsavory reputation is a valuable intimidation tool. Many towns surrender rather than risk being pillaged by such men. Monasteries pay ransoms rather than risk the blasphemies that mercenaries and their camp followers are said to perform on pillaged altars. If captured in battle, mercenaries can expect little

## TYPICAL EQUIPMENT

A mercenary company generally plunders its equipment from the fallen on the battlefield. Its soldiers have a hodgepodge of mismatched armor and weapons, generally in intermediate repair. It is unlikely that a mercenary has more than three dots in Resources.

Typical armor ranges from none to Heavy Armor. A light helm is possible. Melee weapons vary widely; a broadsword and spear are most common. Mercenary companies are often specialists with crossbows. A small shield or footman's shield is common. Only the wealthiest and most successful mercenaries are likely to have a war horse. The company as a whole may have several riding horses for scouting or messengers.

mercy. Many are executed, including their camp followers. As prisoners, only the most famous leaders are worth any ransom.

A mercenary company would be an extremely useful and unusual hiding place for a Cainite. The company generally travels with an encampment of wives and lovers and a large baggage train. The Cainite could shelter with the baggage by day and feed on the surrounding army or countryside by night.

Similarly, a mercenary company would be a useful hiding place for a group of werewolves, although regaining Gnosis while traveling might be difficult. Mages generally prefer a more sedentary life where they can build their laboratories and libraries. Inquisitors usually consider mercenaries sinful, more a danger to their cause than a useful ally. Even so, both mages and the Soldiers of God occasionally find uses for such men, either as cannon fodder, information sources or sometimes even recruits.

## Common Soldiers

Common soldiers are the backbone of the army. They may be free peasants, town levies or even men-at-arms. Some serve for pay (usually equivalent to a crafter in a town) or for plunder. Others serve because their community is required by feudal duties to supply a certain number of warm bodies and appropriate equipment. Their training is generally poor to nonexistent. Their equipment is usually a mix of armor and weapons, generally out-of-date and in ill repair. Knights attack common soldiers mercilessly, as they are worthless as ransom. Some common soldiers are even overridden by knights' charges from their own side.

### TYPICAL EQUIPMENT

A common soldier generally has no armor or Light Armor, a leather cap (functionally no armor) and a variety of melee weapons (typically a broad sword and/or spear). Shields are uncommon. Soldiers who serve with a noble or a trained militia may have bows or crossbows. Slings and staff-slings are uncommon. Soldiers from mountainous areas are the most likely to have any skill with them. Staff-slings can be used to throw small clay pots of powdered quicklime or incendiary oil.

Those who survive their service generally return home, never to re-enlist or appear in the army's rolls again.

Soldiers who are part of a knight's household or mercenary company fare better. Their equipment is in better condition. They generally have some training, often as archers or shield-men. Their lord generally fights near them and protects them from their own overzealous forces. Their lord may even ransom them, which gives those wearing a household badge some value for ransom.

It would be difficult for a Cainite to be a common soldier. The eccentricities and vows that might protect a knight would be laughable insubordination in a soldier. Inquisitors, mages and werewolves could readily serve as common soldiers, but most would not react well to the lack of respect or autonomy.

## Camp Followers

The army is not made of just soldiers and knights. It is among the chaotic mass of camp followers that those who deal with the supernatural find their most comfortable home.

Warlords depend on clergy to maintain morale by preaching, offering confession and communion to soldiers on the eve of battle, and helping to bury the dead. Saints' relics and blessed banners from major abbeys are commonly carried into battle and must be tended by appropriate clerics. War carts with religious insignia are common rallying points. Friars and priests commonly travel with the baggage train.

Well traveled merchants, scouts and former pilgrims guide the army through unfamiliar terrain; maps are virtually nonexistent. Scouts, spies and traitors help the army find and avoid strongholds, river fords, mountain passes, roads and supplies.

Engineers and miners build siege equipment and dig tunnels to undermine walls. Some armies carry the needed parts for siege engines with them;

others send foraging parties out to find sturdy wood when a siege begins. An army also has a variety of blacksmiths, carpenters, coopers and other crafters to maintain its equipment.

Grooms and carters care for horses and supply wagons. The average knight has at least two horses, which need grooming, food and water. If the army is camped at a siege, grooms and carters also have to dispose of a prodigious amount of horse manure.

Women, often common soldiers' wives, follow the camp to carry water, cook, mend and launder clothes. Horses and soldiers need a large amount of water, which has to be carried or carted from the nearest spring or river. Prostitutes generally gather around a military camp for obvious reasons. Many prostitutes are refugees who seek food or money to support their families or seek the protection of a soldier from foraging parties. Often women help with foraging and pillage, care for the sick and dying, and pick over the fallen on a battlefield, dispatching the wounded who are not worth a ransom and looting the dead.

Merchants, male and female, follow the camp or travel to it with vital supplies at exorbitant prices. Some obtain their wares from plunder and looting and then sell the loot back to the army.

Refugees may gather around a defending army for protection or to aid in repelling the invader. The refugees may serve as prostitutes, as water carriers and in other menial roles as needed.

All of these people march with the army, which fortunately moves at a slow pace. Usually, camp followers pack up the tents and gear while the soldiers are starting to march, which puts them at the end of a long line of forces moving along a road or across the country.

When an army pillages a seized town or a battlefield, camp followers are there with them. As with soldiers, they can be punished for unauthorized looting (but rarely are). Some camp followers are also scouts or foragers.

It is much easier for those who deal with the supernatural to live among the camp followers than among the soldiers. Camp followers do not have formal duties and can slip in and out of the army with

### TYPICAL EQUIPMENT

A camp follower usually has no armor, helm or shield. He (or she) may have knives, hatchets, clubs, cudgels, staffs and other weapons to defend the camp in case the army is overrun or the baggage attacked.

relative ease. They generally take charge of the baggage train and can easily hide any equipment they need in it. Inquisitors may travel "openly" as clergy with the army where they can preach and try to uncover heretics and night-creatures among its ranks. Cainites may travel among the camp followers to prey on soldiers and knights each evening. Mages may travel as advisors to warlords. Werewolves are least likely to want to be within an army but will stand out less among the camp followers.

## Armies of the Shadows

*Right of Princes* discusses defending demesnes, but what happens when the supernatural takes the offensive? Some beings, such as ghouls, are barely distinguishable from human soldiers. Others are fiendish creations saved for shadowy battles between monsters or as doomsday weapons to destroy an enemy's fortress.

## Blood and Ghouls

Since Constantinople's fall to the Latin Crusaders, no Cainite takes even a rumor of war lightly. Wars are dangerous and dirty, and often make one's supper late. They are also a tremendous opportunity to destroy powerful foes under the cover of human attacks and seize the suddenly vacant domain.

The first thought of many Cainites when a human lord summons her retainers and herd is to wonder which of her foes is using the demand as cover for an attack. The second thought is how to use the war themselves to gain land and territory. Cainites take advantage of Backgrounds such as Allies, Contacts, Influence and Resources, as well as any Disciplines, to find out more about the summons, the forces involved and the target. If the prize looks inviting, and the competition manageable, one may join the army herself.

The first concern is blood. A Cainite should leave for war well fed, before famine and disease deplete the herd. It is a good idea to take part of one's herd along for feeding on the road. Feeding from the army in its nightly camp is no harder than feeding in the seedy district of an appropriate sized city or town, but fewer places exist to hide if something goes wrong. A Cainite can hunt in the surrounding countryside, but that means traveling away from the army into the area denuded during the day by foragers.

The second priority is one's resting place. Absent sufficient dots in the Protean discipline, the only secure place to travel alongside an army on the move is with the baggage train. This implies ghouls (human or animal), thralls or trusted retainers to defend her

crate from inspection or an attack on the baggage train. A Cainite needs to be absolutely certain of her guardians' loyalties. Betrayal or gossip is likely fatal. She may contact potential allies along the army's route to arrange resting places and to avoid unnecessary confrontations. Of course, she runs the risk that her diplomatic efforts may come to her target's attention through spies or allies.

A Cainite who has mastered the Protean discipline sufficiently to inter herself in the earth can rest safely by day, but she then has to catch up with the army after sunset or run ahead of it just before dawn each day to rise where it is expected to camp.

While the army travels, she may scout among it for potential childe to Embrace as canon fodder if things go poorly. She might even find worthy long-term prospects to help her protect a domain, should she seize it.

Tzimisce lords call upon their *szlachta* and *vozhd* war-ghouls. Tremere call upon their Gargoyles. These creatures are mostly used in dark battles far from mortal eyes. The mere sight of such a monster would terrify a typical human army into uselessness, even were it fighting on their side. Even if a Cainite is going to war with his monsters, he is often careful to avoid well traveled roads and large centers of population. Foragers and scouts instead look for villages that can be captured and destroyed whole to supply the thirsty army on the march.

## On Quest

What might a mage want from an army? Mistridge's fall in 1210 was, for mages, a clarion call similar to Constantinople's fall for Cainites. A mage, despite his power, is very much human and most likely grew up among commoners. He may hold land as a noble, be called to service in a militia or levy, or have family and friends called into an army. A mage may, of course, join an army out of duty, desire for glory or a need for wealth. More often, however, mages join armies for power, supernatural plunder or as a matter of faith. A few may even join to harvest spell components from the battlefield, like the teeth of great warriors slain in battle needed to make Dragons' Teeth (see *Dark Ages: Mage* p. 198).

An ambitious mage might seek to travel among the army as an advisor to a king or duke. Certainly, a mage could do a great deal to swing the tides of battle. If she couched her advice or arts in the guise of astrology, a warlord might well listen. Unfortunately, priests and friars traveling among the army

may object to an astrologer who does not show the highest moral character. While astrology is an acceptable art, even among some clergy, priests and peasants alike might be suspicious that a successful diviner is in league with darker forces. Even a mage of the Messianic Voices needs to tread carefully when encouraging crusaders against heresy and Muslims. The mage risks becoming the scapegoat for the first defeat, outbreak of disease or other misfortune.

Old Faith mages are more actively involved as advisors in the Baltic, where Christianity is not yet dominant. There, Old Faith mages actively support human armies against the Teutonic Knights and their Messianic Voice allies. While these mages typically find more unconditional acceptance than Christian mages do, their brutal Aura still draws others to look their way when fortunes turn against the army.

Of all those who deal with the supernatural, mages are the best suited to lead mercenary companies. They can be abroad during the day. They don't panic horses and pack animals by their presence. They can hire their company in campaigns that net them plunder from a rival's chantry.

A besieging army is also a good way to weaken the mortal allies and defenses of vampiric Tremere. Some mages of the Order of Hermes used the Crusades to plunder Outremer for hidden knowledge and used the Albigensian Crusade to hunt down the Tremere.

Mages can be found among the camp followers. While camp followers have little formal power, a village cunning man, or wise woman, may be in as much demand as priests and friars among soldiers seeking charms, amulets or just peace of mind before a battle. Here too, a mage must walk lightly to avoid the attention of priests and friars, who may deem a popular wise woman a witch or heretic.

As with werewolves, mages have little privacy in the army to conduct their rituals or use their talismans and poultices. Familiars (animal or spirit) and magical constructs may draw unwanted attention. The battlefield of 1230 is centuries before the witch hysteria, but a medieval priest is still on guard against maleficium and heresy.

Mages may create golems and other constructs, or summon spirits to fight beside them. As with vampires and werewolves, a mage rarely employs these forces alongside human troops for fear of panicking the commoners and drawing the Church's attention. These powerful creations or allies are reserved for battles against other equally fearsome foes.

## The Wolf's Howl

When Gaia's warriors hear the summons to war, many long to fight for glory and renown. Little renown comes from fighting human soldiers. Werewolves have not seen the power of a mortal army victorious over a major caern, as the vampires saw the destruction of Constantinople and the mages saw the destruction of Mistridge (a great caern near Paris did in fact fall recently, but not to an army — see **Dark Ages: Werewolf**). A werewolf knows in her bones that even a small army poses little physical danger to her, unless the soldiers are equipped with silver. A werewolf could, in fact, become a legendary warrior among humans, were it not for the Litany's command not to lift the Veil.

On the other hand, war is a good way to trim the ranks of ever-growing human settlements. An urban siege may disrupt the defenses of its Leeches and give a pack of warriors a chance to clean out their enemies. Alternatively, a pack might come together to protect an urban caern from destruction in a human siege of the city.

Werewolves may battle other septs or tribes under the cover of an army. The Litany forbids causing a caern to be violated. Some werewolves interpret this to require capturing a caern if their sept can defend it (and their original caern) better than the sept that holds the other caern. Fenrir, in particular, are notorious for trying to capture caerns they believe are vulnerable. If an attack fails and weakens both septs' defenders enough for some other power to destroy either caern, the attackers are reviled for their misjudgment.

A werewolf in the midst of a human army needs to be able to control her Rage and avoid frenzy. When a knight treats a werewolf like another dung-covered soldier, assuming Crinos form to gut him crotch to pate is the surest way to disrupt one's allies and foes alike. A werewolf needs to be able to cope with the petty frustrations and slights of an army at war.

Werewolves, like Cainites, have distinct problems with domesticated animals; the army is full of horses, dogs, mules, chickens and sheep. Any domesticated beast will sense the wild Rage in a shapeshifter and react poorly, unless the werewolf possesses a Gift that mitigates that effect. Other soldiers and knights will notice when the animals growl or whimper at her passing and may investigate.

It is difficult to maintain privacy sleeping in tents and under blankets. If a werewolf's fetishes are visible, gossip may attract the attention of priests or friars. Similarly, a werewolf may have to feign participation in masses and sermons given in the field.



A werewolf could trail the army in wolf form. Legends say wolves followed armies to feast on the battlefield dead. A soldier who sees a wolf near the army in wooded terrain would not think it remarkable, but he might try to kill it or drive it away so that it did not eat the wounded and dead.

Armor is another problem. Normally, clothing shreds when a werewolf changes form. Armor, on the other hand, may well injure the werewolf before it breaks. The Rite of Talisman Dedication could allow armor to be bonded to the werewolf's body. A werewolf might be able to obtain cloth armor sufficiently loose to survive transformation into Glabro and then pass for human in the confusion of a battle, especially if the character also wears a helmet.

Wars among werewolves usually involve packs, Kinfolk and sometimes spirit allies, fighting deep in the forest, far from mortal eyes. A pack that wants to attack an urban pack or vampire might begin by starting a fire or a riot to distract their quarry and the local watch.

## Sheepdogs and Their Flock

The Poor Knights of the Passion of the Cross of Acre are a military order and may join any army, if they deem the cause worthy. The Poor Knights share

much of the public respect given to the Templars and Hospitalers, the better-known military orders. Because the Poor Knights are charged with protecting pilgrimage routes, warlords often seek them out as guides and informants. A knight's willingness to assist is often tied to his perception of the cause and concerns about avoiding risk to pilgrims and holy sites that might be pillaged by an army.

As do their brothers, the Poor Knights have a well-deserved reputation for righteousness, bordering on arrogance, which can spark tempers in a fractious army. Poor Knights who entered the order as converts from the Templars and Hospitalers are generally ostracized by their peers, which can also cause problems within an army.

The Poor Knights are often active in surrender negotiations for besieged cities, although their goal is to capture the city in a way that does the most damage to the servants and defenses of any night-fiends that dwell within.

The House of Murnau is a noble family of the Holy Roman Empire, and its members may be called to war as part of their feudal duties. The complex, fragile politics of the Holy Roman Empire often involve family members in diplomacy, alliances and fund-raising as well. Murnau nobles

are acutely sensitive to night-fiend machinations within the army or those who support it. Once a Murnau noble has found a monster within the army or its allies, he can try to unmask it or call for more aid. Few better places exist to confront most fiends than in the midst of an angry, superstitious group of heavily armed men.

Normally stationary members of the Oculi Dei are sometimes conscripted into armies. Itinerant Oculi sometimes join the army looking for a chance to travel and to spy on powerful rulers within the limited privacy of an army on the march. A few become permanent members (or leaders) of mercenary companies, siege engineers, carters or clerks within a noble's household. The lack of privacy also makes it difficult for members to pass on their coded warnings to other members of the Inquisition, but Oculi do their best under trying circumstances.

It is possible, but unlikely, to find a Sister of St. John or a member of the Red Order on the battlefield. Both orders spend much of their time in their monasteries and cloisters. A monk of the Red Order or Sister of St. John might be a refugee, traveling among the camp followers after an abbey or convent was pillaged. A monk might be a knight's confessor or advisor. A nun of exceptional devotion, purity and strength of character might be a knight's advisor or confessor. A nun might also advise and escort a female noble, like Queen Blanche of France, on campaign.

## Logistics

Any warlord should worry about logistics; many don't. Their campaigns trust to faith and luck, and often fail in the field. Food and the problems of transporting it over rivers, by roads, on pack animals and in wagons is the single biggest limitation on the size of the medieval army and on how long it can stay in the field. Those who deal with the supernatural may try to augment, or disrupt, an army's food supply as a way of channeling it toward, or away from, their lairs or a preferred target.

An army that is tired, hungry, thirsty and feverish will rebel or desert. Keeping the army well fed is only partly the warlord's concern. He generally worries about overall logistics. Each noble and mercenary captain worries about where his men will find shelter and food each night, and about the fodder and water for their horses.

When a warlord provides food, it is not free. Royal sheriffs and local officials can demand goods for the army by compulsory purchase at a discounted price

and transport them to the marshaling place. There, the warlord's merchants sell the food and supplies to soldiers, nobles and captains at a slight profit. (The warlord may also give food in lieu of wages or as gifts and rewards.) No "mess halls" exist for the army as a whole. Camp followers draw water, bake bread and brew ale for their individual households or companies.

## Food and Water

Primary sources guess the largest royal army at about 20,000 to 30,000 soldiers and knights, and even that is likely a generous overestimate. A typical royal army in the field is less than 10,000 to 20,000 combatants. An earl or baron's army is much smaller — perhaps 100 knights and 300 soldiers for the largest private force.

The royal army is the equivalent of a medieval city, with all the attendant problems of food, water and waste. In addition to that, about half of the combatants are knights and sergeants, each with one or more horses that need to be fed and watered each night. An army waiting for good weather to cross a river, or the English Channel, or embark for Outremer, can do significant damage to the area around the port as they consume all of the surplus food and fodder and leave a massive pile of human and animal waste to wash into the water supply.

In most of Europe water is plentiful. The army can march near rivers and draw water as it needs it. Adequate water is a much more significant problem in Outremer, where its lack has cost many Crusaders their lives. An army needs eight gallons of water per horse per day, and at least one gallon of water per human per day (often used to make ale).

Food is usually in the form of flour or grain and pottage (beans, peas and oatmeal). Salted fish or meat is less common. Each soldier and camp follower needs a minimum of two and a half pounds of bread (which needs two pounds of flour or three and a half pounds of grain) per day. For an army of 20,000 or even 100, all that grain quickly adds up.

Horses also need fodder. A single horse needs 10 pounds of hay per day and an additional 10 pounds of oats if it is going to be doing heavy work. A knight's horse can carry its own supplies, although richer knights travel with a separate wagon or pack animal (which also needs to be fed). An army on the march does not have time to let horses graze for any significant part of their meals.

Soldiers drink a gallon or more of weak ale per day. (Water is often polluted and rightly deemed unsafe.) A

## SUPERNATURAL LOGISTICS

A supernatural force's logistics are as complex as for their mundane counterparts. A Storyteller can use the endless need for resources as a way to drive characters to interact with other supernatural powers or to dissuade characters from using a human army as the solution to every obstacle.

Vampires need blood to survive and even more blood to sustain any ghouls. An army is a portable blood source, but hunting in the midst of fractious armed men has obvious risks. Similarly, a herd could be wiped out in a single battle or by disease. A vampire can forage as long as she leaves either no trace, or a scene of carnage that can be mistaken for another massacre by the invading soldiers.

Werewolves need Gnosis to power their Gifts and often to supply their spiritual allies. A werewolf can acquire Gnosis by meditation or rituals, but an army is hardly the best place for either peaceful reflection or summoning spirits. Few septs will invite an unknown pack of werewolves to visit their caern or attend their moots.

Mages need Quintessence for their arts and to feed their familiars. As with Gnosis, it is difficult to recover Quintessence on the march. Characters with the Fount Background have less difficulty, but even they will not wish to let their reserves fall too low. A mage may be tempted to seek out crays along the route, find supernatural creatures to slay and harvest, travel into the Umbra or divert a foraging party, or even the entire army, to weaken a werewolf caern.

Inquisitors are best suited for travel with the army. They do not need Conviction in the same sense as vampires need blood or as werewolves and mages need Gnosis and Quintessence. It is also much easier for an inquisitor to find an appropriate place to pray than for werewolves or mages to find appropriate sources of power; a charismatic inquisitor could easily cobble together a flock with which to pray during a long campaign. On the other hand, many horrible things happen in wars that have nothing to do with supernatural foes. An inquisitor may lose heart at seeing the inhumanity of man against man and find herself growing Callous (see **Dark Ages: Inquisitor**, p. 162).

batch of ale can be prepared in a day or less but sours within a few days. The army's camp followers are often continuously busy making ale in vats for each household.

## Morale

Keeping an army composed of dozens or hundreds of distinct units — each with its own training and leadership — together on the road or in the field is a difficult task. The would-be warlord needs to be charismatic, first and foremost. His knights and barons must be inspired, either by him or by the rewards his campaign promises, or the army will disintegrate as soon as its members' feudal duties have ended or a delay in pay or plunder occurs. A warlord must be wary of rival subordinates with strong reputations or large, loyal followings. If the warlord should differ with his rival, the army could disintegrate into factions.

A warlord's allies and subordinates may be gifted manipulators, working behind the scene to keep the army together. Clergy, merchants and moneylenders may have powerful incentives to support a warlord for faith or profit, or both. Vampires, mages, inquisitors and werewolves can exert a great deal of influence using their powers to quell differences, or augment disputes, to hold an army in the field, or to sow dissent and jealousy until it disintegrates. A character who openly uses supernatural powers may find that she has foes with similar powers opposing her. A struggle between two or more characters for control of an army is likely to destroy it. Alliances, betrayals and rivalries are as likely among those who deal with the supernatural as among the army's mundane counterparts.

## Training

A warlord does not need to train his army. Medieval knights do not drill in groups and formations the way that Roman legions did. At best, knights and soldiers learn simple signals given by horn, drum or banners. Instead, knights learn the art of war from practice, hunting, tournament and combat. Military treatises are rare, as is literacy. The chronicles and ballads are entertaining but no substitute for actual experience.

For the warlord, hiring knights and mercenaries is a bargain. They arrive at the muster point at least partially trained at their landholder's expense (or at least forgone income). They usually also arrive equipped, again at their landholder's expense. That armor, horse and equipment is worth six to eight months' daily wages for a skilled crafter.

A warlord doesn't pay for this training or the use of the equipment — daily wages for a soldier are not

much higher than for a skilled laborer. A warlord might reimburse knights for lost horses if the knight proves his loss with the horse's ears and tail, but the custom varies. Even paying the knight in the field is a bargain: the pay is just enough to feed and maintain the knight, his equipment and his horses.

Men are not the only ones trained in battle. Female landholders have the feudal duties to supply knights and soldiers too. A few even lead their troops to battle. Eleanor of Aquitaine, it is said, wore armor and led a group of armed women when she went with her husband Louis VII on crusade in 1147–1149. Rumors of women dressing in men's clothing as common soldiers to serve in the army and on crusade also surface.

Women receive less formal training in weapons and armor; noble women are experienced riders, however. A landholder's wife or widow is expected to lead the household in defense of the lands and castle, so she is usually familiar with basic tactics and equipment. Townswomen are rarely formally trained but do defend the walls and operate siege engines during attacks. The women of Toulouse killed Simon de Montfort in June 1218 with their siege engine during his attack on their city.

## On the Road

It may take months or even a year for a warlord to assemble enough troops at the muster point for his campaign. Once the army has assembled, it may be delayed weeks, or months, by disease. If it is traveling by sea, the army may be delayed waiting for favorable weather or for the arrival of hired ships. The delay means boredom, disease and desertions.

A large army stretches along miles of road. In friendly territory, foragers may still spread across the countryside to purchase grain and supplies from villages. Depending on the warlord's legal rights, the "purchase" may be voluntary or by intimidation or outright seizure. The lords through whose lands an army travels certainly will not welcome the disruption. Often even an ally will not allow a traveling army to enter its walls, forcing it to camp in the outlying fields while the commanders and clerks purchase supplies. Again, delays securing free passage mean more desertions and disease.

Once the army reaches hostile terrain, scouts and foraging parties are let loose. They will likely encounter their defending counterparts, resulting in a series of skirmishes while the main army looks for its opponent.

## Siege and Camp

A stationary army is a bored army. Sieges are usually long and dull. While carpenters, engineers and miners are building siege devices and digging under the walls, most soldiers are busy foraging or tending their equipment in camp.

For the most part, the army lives in tents, under tarps and in captured buildings of varying conditions. Soldiers often sleep on the ground, hoping to find a soft, dry spot for the night; knights usually have tents and some may have portable beds in their baggage. A besieging army can take the time to build shelters for its men and horses or may just live in buildings outside the walls that are out of reach of the defenders.

A stationary army attracts refugees, merchants and prostitutes. The livelihood of the countryside has been disrupted. The army may be the nearest source of food, water, shelter and protection for those outside the walls. These refugees multiply the warlord's logistics problems as well as create obvious security risks.

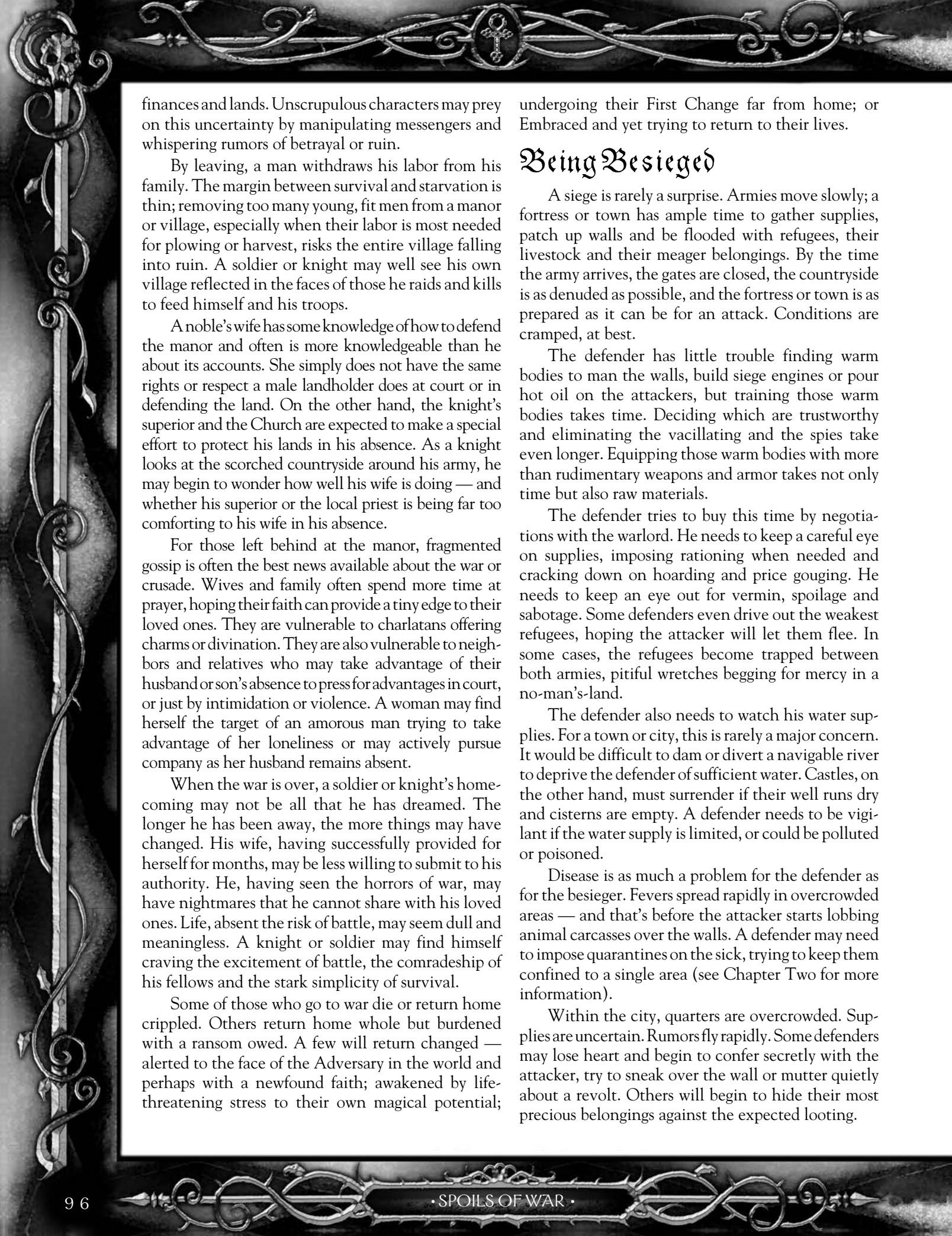
Fevers and disease are common in the camp. Sanitation is crude at best. Water supplies are often contaminated. Cities in marshy areas are prone to malaria. A siege may come down to a contest of stamina to see whether the defender or attacker can withstand the fevers and infections longer.

A city generally has a dependable supply of water from its river that the besieging army can share. Castles, on the other hand, may be distant from a source of water large enough to support both the attacker and defender.

Food for both the city and besieging army are uncertain. The longer the army has to wait, the further its foraging parties have to move into the countryside. As the season progresses toward harvest, the besieger can look forward to replenishing supplies. On the other hand, as the weather grows wetter and colder, the more difficult it is to shelter the army.

## Back at the Manor

Any soldier going to war is concerned about the family and home he leaves behind. When a knight goes to war, he must leave his home in the hands of his wife and children. No postal service exists in the Dark Medieval world. Even where there are dependable merchants or messengers, many knights and most soldiers are not literate; they neither receive encouragement from home nor "Dear Sir John" letters. Characters with supernatural abilities may be able to send information over longer distances, but even they likely feel a nagging uncertainty about their family,



finances and lands. Unscrupulous characters may prey on this uncertainty by manipulating messengers and whispering rumors of betrayal or ruin.

By leaving, a man withdraws his labor from his family. The margin between survival and starvation is thin; removing too many young, fit men from a manor or village, especially when their labor is most needed for plowing or harvest, risks the entire village falling into ruin. A soldier or knight may well see his own village reflected in the faces of those he raids and kills to feed himself and his troops.

A noble's wife has some knowledge of how to defend the manor and often is more knowledgeable than he about its accounts. She simply does not have the same rights or respect a male landholder does at court or in defending the land. On the other hand, the knight's superior and the Church are expected to make a special effort to protect his lands in his absence. As a knight looks at the scorched countryside around his army, he may begin to wonder how well his wife is doing — and whether his superior or the local priest is being far too comforting to his wife in his absence.

For those left behind at the manor, fragmented gossip is often the best news available about the war or crusade. Wives and family often spend more time at prayer, hoping their faith can provide a tiny edge to their loved ones. They are vulnerable to charlatans offering charms or divination. They are also vulnerable to neighbors and relatives who may take advantage of their husband or son's absence to press for advantages in court, or just by intimidation or violence. A woman may find herself the target of an amorous man trying to take advantage of her loneliness or may actively pursue company as her husband remains absent.

When the war is over, a soldier or knight's homecoming may not be all that he has dreamed. The longer he has been away, the more things may have changed. His wife, having successfully provided for herself for months, may be less willing to submit to his authority. He, having seen the horrors of war, may have nightmares that he cannot share with his loved ones. Life, absent the risk of battle, may seem dull and meaningless. A knight or soldier may find himself craving the excitement of battle, the comradeship of his fellows and the stark simplicity of survival.

Some of those who go to war die or return home crippled. Others return home whole but burdened with a ransom owed. A few will return changed — alerted to the face of the Adversary in the world and perhaps with a newfound faith; awakened by life-threatening stress to their own magical potential;

undergoing their First Change far from home; or Embraced and yet trying to return to their lives.

## Being Besieged

A siege is rarely a surprise. Armies move slowly; a fortress or town has ample time to gather supplies, patch up walls and be flooded with refugees, their livestock and their meager belongings. By the time the army arrives, the gates are closed, the countryside is as denuded as possible, and the fortress or town is as prepared as it can be for an attack. Conditions are cramped, at best.

The defender has little trouble finding warm bodies to man the walls, build siege engines or pour hot oil on the attackers, but training those warm bodies takes time. Deciding which are trustworthy and eliminating the vacillating and the spies take even longer. Equipping those warm bodies with more than rudimentary weapons and armor takes not only time but also raw materials.

The defender tries to buy this time by negotiations with the warlord. He needs to keep a careful eye on supplies, imposing rationing when needed and cracking down on hoarding and price gouging. He needs to keep an eye out for vermin, spoilage and sabotage. Some defenders even drive out the weakest refugees, hoping the attacker will let them flee. In some cases, the refugees become trapped between both armies, pitiful wretches begging for mercy in a no-man's-land.

The defender also needs to watch his water supplies. For a town or city, this is rarely a major concern. It would be difficult to dam or divert a navigable river to deprive the defender of sufficient water. Castles, on the other hand, must surrender if their well runs dry and cisterns are empty. A defender needs to be vigilant if the water supply is limited, or could be polluted or poisoned.

Disease is as much a problem for the defender as for the besieger. Fevers spread rapidly in overcrowded areas — and that's before the attacker starts lobbing animal carcasses over the walls. A defender may need to impose quarantines on the sick, trying to keep them confined to a single area (see Chapter Two for more information).

Within the city, quarters are overcrowded. Supplies are uncertain. Rumors fly rapidly. Some defenders may lose heart and begin to confer secretly with the attacker, try to sneak over the wall or mutter quietly about a revolt. Others will begin to hide their most precious belongings against the expected looting.

Bullies and rogues often profit in sieges at the expense of the weak and honest. Bullies have no qualms about extorting money, sex and supplies from those unable to protect themselves while the local authorities are busy worrying about the attacking army. Workers and crafters, deprived of their jobs, may turn to begging, theft or prostitution to survive.

Crowding creates a greater risk of fire, which spreads rapidly through the mostly wooden structures of a typical town. The defender sets watches, armed with buckets of water, ladders and long hooks, against fire, but they cannot be everywhere at once. If the attacker starts lobbing flaming ammunition over the wall, he destroys many of the town's valuables, but he might also intimidate other towns into surrendering without resistance.

If the situation looks desperate, people flock to churches, preachers, friars or nearly any charismatic person who offers them hope. People may betray their kin, sell their ancestral homes or barter their very souls for a promise of safety. An unscrupulous character can profit well by playing on these fears.

Cainites, werewolves, mages and inquisitors caught in a fortress or town under siege have many options. They can flee — most have many options for escape that cannot be duplicated by mere mortals. They can

spy on the enemy. Many have keen senses and abilities to slip past the walls into the siege camp. They can spread dissension, either in the fortress or town to force surrender instead of holding out and being pillaged, or in the besieging army to try to force it to withdraw. They can try to reach allies, mortal or otherwise, to relieve the siege.

## War's Domain

Campaigns in 1230 are rarely a series of continuous battles. Instead, a war is really a series of raids, pillaging, sieges, ambushes and surprises. Pitched battles are rare. The attacker risks average casualties of 5 to 20 %. The defender, in turn, risks average casualties of 20 to 50%. Thus, few leaders risk the chance of death, crippling injury, ruinous ransom or political disaster that accompanies a battle even on the most favorable terms if they can find other ways to achieve their goals.

"Hot spots" flame intermittently as a warlord raises troops, makes a few quick attacks and hopes that some quick victories and plunder will keep his army together past the traditional 40 to 60 days of feudal service (although as the practice of scutage gains in popularity, this is less of a concern). When the warlord runs



out of money, supplies or success, his army tends to disintegrate as his vassals and soldiers finish the service they are obliged to give. The warlord then must retire to his strongholds and hold any conquests while raising funds and soldiers for another foray. The campaign season, at least in northern Europe, begins around Easter and ends around the harvest. Few armies remain in the field over winter.

## Hot Spots

Human beings don't seem very adept at peace. Although the Sixth Crusade is over, numerous battles still rage all over Europe. The causes for such have been discussed already (in Chapter One), but their locations bear some attention as well.

The supernatural forces at work in the Dark Medieval aren't officially at war but certainly aren't peaceful cohabitants of the land, either. The werewolves take offense at the very existence of the undead, hunting them down and scattering their ashes when the Cainites ride too close to the wild places. The Mystic Fellowships each have their own goals, but few mages are above slaying a supernatural being and harvesting its body for Tass — and this includes both vampires and werewolves. The Cainites, for their part, spend most of their energy fighting each other in a campaign to win land and blood for their lords in the War of Princes, but the other denizens of the Dark Medieval occasionally provide obstruction or opportunity. Finally, the wild element in all of this is the Inquisition. Despite what the Theodosians might say, God does not allow for compromise. The unholy must perish in flames.

Specific "hot spots," both mortal and supernatural are listed below:

### Eastern Europe

Eastern Europe is an ongoing battlefield. The Teutonic Knights have begun a long campaign to conquer Prussia. Hermann von Salza, the order's Grand Master, has recently been named a prince of the Holy Roman Empire. The knights were recently expelled from Hungary by King Andreas II, who feared their power threatened his own, but a few knights are still active.

The Brothers of the Sword based in Livonia, in the Baltic, have not yet joined the order, but they are frequent allies. The Brothers of the Sword are involved in a continuous series of raids, revolts, conquests and defeats. Knights from elsewhere in Europe sometimes join in campaigns in the Baltic and Prussia, but most remain busy with wars closer to their homelands.

Hardestadt the Elder and his childe Lord Jürgen actively support the Teutonic Knights and have been using their advances as part of an ongoing campaign against the Tzimisce. The Tzimisce are, in turn, caught between the Ventre and a bloody war with the Tremere. The isolated forests and mountains of Eastern Europe are one of the few places where Cainites can make war openly with little fear of mere mortals intervening.

The Tremere, in turn, are also fighting on two fronts. As Cainites they must defend themselves from the Tzimisce. As mages, they are under attack by the Order of Hermes. Fortunately, Eastern Europe is far from the strongest Hermetic chantries. While mages may seek allies among the Tzimisce, such alliances are generally short and ill-fated. Instead, Hermetic mages have been busy trying to strengthen Venetian-backed Constantinople to use it as a base against their foes.

The Garou of Latvia war with the Brotherhood of the Sword and their allies (although the human knights seldom know exactly what they face). Many of their Kinfolk have been slain. The Red Talons, Silver Fangs, Children of Gaia, and Fenrir are all actively trying to resist the Christian invaders. In the same manner, the Valdaermen and Old Faith mages are also hard-pressed by the Christian knights. They have been assisting local armies in resisting the invaders but have been unable to unite the defenders under a sufficiently strong leader.

The Inquisition is aware of many problems in Eastern Europe, but it also has pressing problems closer to Rome. The area would be a fertile ground for any cell, but it is far from dependable support and information.

### England and the British Isles

The English monarchy has been involved in ongoing struggles on the borders with Wales and with Scotland. Tensions also continue with France over the lands John I lost in Normandy and Poitiers.

The Order of Hermes is busy expanding its chantries in and around Oxford University (50 miles west of London). The Oxford student/town riot of 1209 was partly encouraged by Hermetic mages, who used the riots to locate and destroy several ghouls in service to the vampiric Prince of Oxford. Elsewhere in England, the Old Faith is dying out but still defends its followers and its crays from intruders.

The British Isles are home to the Fianna, Fenrir and Silver Fangs. Centuries ago, Scotland was once home to the White Howler tribe, now lost to the Wyrm. As England expands into Wales and Scotland, many Fenrir and Fianna septes are losing their tradi-

tional hunting grounds to the Silver Fang allies of the English nobles. The Germanic Fenrir and the Scandinavian Fenrir often fight among themselves but will unite with their Fianna allies against a hostile invader or sign of the Wyrm.

The Inquisition is becoming active in England. The area boasts few organized heretics to draw its attention. English pilgrims are well represented on the routes to Santiago de Compostela, however, and each tale the Inquisition hears about the night-folk of England brings the Soldiers of God closer to the Isles.

## France

Northern France is not a "hot spot" for warfare. The major barons and counts are testing the power of young King Louis IX and his regent, Queen-Mother Blanche of Castile. The king's support still remains strong. Slowly, the truculent major landholders are ending their rebellions and swearing fealty to the crown. Ongoing tensions with England over the lands Philippe II Auguste captured in Normandy and Poitiers simmer, but the tensions do not look likely to erupt in war.

Paris is the heart of the Courts of Love. Vampiric politics are vicious but rarely openly violent. Open warfare among northern French Cainites is rare, at least so far.

The ongoing strike at the University of Paris is making study difficult for the mages among the students and faculty. Several mages are among those trying to find a diplomatic solution to the dispute over whether the French monarchy has the power to discipline university students and faculty or whether the university body is subject only to its own leaders and, ultimately, the Pope. Parisian friars continue to teach despite the ban, causing friction between Hermetic mages (who support the university's struggle) and Messianic Voices mages (who support the friars). This friction sometimes turns into a street riot but would not spark an actual war.

Northern France has been very well settled for many generations. Several werewolf tribes have caerns in France. Some tribes have been pushed toward less settled areas in Auvergne, Brittany, Dauphine and along the Alps and Pyrenees, where they have found Wyrm creatures. The Garou are pressed into uncomfortably small hunting grounds and the strain is starting to show among them.

Inquisitors are active in Paris, which is a stronghold of the Red Order. Many have a strong sense that a number of powerful night-fiends have their claws in the city. The Inquisition has hopes that Queen Blanche and her son will remain strong in their faith and have been actively trying to keep the Adversary's minions away from the royal court. Again, the most overt sign of this

struggle is a riot or brawl in which a servant of the Adversary is killed or wounded.

Paris at one time also held a great caern, controlled by the Warders of Men. That caern has fallen into the hands of a cult known as the Circle of Red. The Garou, naturally, don't plan to take this insult lightly and even now search for a way to break the sorcerers' power. The fact that the ceremonial garb of the Circle of Red is similar to that of the Order of Saint Theodosius, however, promises needless bloodshed in the future.

Even the Albigensian Crusade in the southern French county of Toulouse is in a lull following the Peace of Paris. Some ambitious soldiers and knights expect the truce to fail and are looking for adventure in the area. Most, however, are moving on to more restless areas or are taking advantage of the truce to lick their wounds. Inquisitors are active in Toulouse, searching for adherents of the Cainite Heresy. They have successfully eradicated most of the heretics, but a few pockets remain. Inquisitors might be surprised to find that Queen Esclarmonde, the vampiric Queen of the region, is likewise trying to purge the remnants of the Heresy, if only to be rid of the Crusaders infesting her lands.

## The Holy Roman Empire

Unrest continues between the German princes and the Holy Roman Emperor. Frederick II has been giving the German princes a great deal of autonomy in return for their support of his policies in northern Italy. This has led to conflict with Frederick's son, Henry (VII), which some expect to lead to outright rebellion.

Germany is a fractious, busy place with lots of small conflicts to attract warlords. Rivalries and intrigues among the Cainite princes involve Hardestadt the Elder, the exiled Alexander of Paris, and the French Courts of Love. Their struggles might spark, or take advantage of, mortal wars. Cainite struggles in Eastern Europe may also have repercussions at the heart of the empire as various forces search for allies in their struggles.

The Fenrir hold the Black Forest, despite challenges from other tribes, including Black Furies raiding from their caerns in Eastern Europe. A savage group of Feral Cainites (the Schwarze Rudel or Black Pack) also challenges the Fenrir's dominance of the forest. The Shadow Lords, Silver Fangs and Red Talons also have powerful septs in forests and wooded areas. The Warders and Bone Gnawers are active in the trade cities of the Hanse battling the Leeches and occasionally mages.

Mages are active in Germany, but they are not engaged in any major internal struggle. They may easily come into conflict with Cainites, werewolves or the

Murnau family (one of the major components of the Inquisition) if a war breaks out.

## Iberia

The *Reconquista* is ongoing. The Christians are confident of their ultimate victory. The Christian kings of Castile and Leon won a major victory in 1212 at Las Navas de Tolosa. Majorca, an island group in the Mediterranean, has also recently fallen to the Christians. Castile is only now beginning to exploit the victory as the remaining Muslim states fracture in internal disagreements. Cordoba and Seville are being strongly pressed. Within a few decades, Grenada will be the only remaining Arab stronghold. Iberia is still an active place for mortal warlords seeking glory, plunder or redemption in battle.

Iberia is a stronghold of the Lasombra, but a number of other clans have made inroads during the Reconquest. The ongoing wars have upset centuries-old power balances among the various princes. Certainly, Arabic Cainites are not giving up their domains without a hard battle.

A similar battle is being fought between various werewolf tribes who have Kinfolk among the Christian and Arabic populations. The Children of Gaia try in vain to keep mortal struggles from overflowing into brutal wars among the Garou.

Hermetic mages travel with Crusader armies in hopes of plundering Arabic libraries and sites in the remaining kingdoms. Mages from the Messianic Voices similarly travel among the Crusaders to inspire them to recapture the entire country. Both groups also spread out across the conquered countryside in search of hidden strongholds and crays, occasionally coming across hold-outs or werewolves defending their caerns.

The Inquisition, especially the Poor Knights of Acre, has been active in the area. Some groups patrol the pilgrimage routes to Santiago de Compostela in Leon. Others are prowling around the newly conquered areas looking for night-fiends in the rubble.

## Italy

Italy is brimming with potential for a would-be warlord. Frederick II and Pope Gregory IX have been at war for two years (1228–1230) over Sicily. They reach a truce in July 1230, but the tensions remain. Frederick II continues to have small skirmishes in Sicily trying to maintain his hold over his Norman kin.

In northern Italy, the communes are expecting another war with the Emperor. Frederick II is considering another effort to assert his imperial rights over the northern cities. Diplomats and messengers are traveling between Milan (the traditional leader of any anti-

imperial alliance) and the other city-states searching for allies and mercenaries.

Northern Italy is overpopulated with vampires, which makes politics complicated and deadly. Several of the northern communes have multiple factions, even multiple princes, each involved in alliances and rivalries with the others. With enemies so close to hand, battles are usually disguised as street riots, not wars. Several children look to the chaos of the Albigensian Crusade and dream about killing their sires — or rivals — and blaming the deaths on Frederick II's armies.

Northern Italy has its share of mages, especially around the University of Bologna and its competitors. Outside the universities, large numbers of merchants make for a literate, numerate population with many clerks, notaries and scribes.

Central and Southern Italy and the islands of Corsica, Sardinia and the interior of Sicily are less thoroughly settled. There, werewolves still have ample space to roam and fight with each other over territory. Warders, Shadow Lords and Bone Gnawer septs near many Italian cities find themselves drawn by their Kinfolk into the fractious, often violent, politics of Italian communal life and strain to avoid lifting the Veil. Several septs hope that the upcoming struggles between Frederick II and the northern communes will give the opportunity to thin the ranks of Italy's Leeches.

Rome is the spiritual headquarters of the Inquisition. Inquisitors have their hands full trying to protect the pilgrims who come to Rome. Cardinal Marzone's efforts to cleanse the Adversary from the Lateran and the Papal Curia progress slowly, if at all. Another war, and perhaps another sack of Rome itself, might give the Inquisition the opportunity to execute some of its nigh-untouchable foes, although at a high cost in casualties.

## Latin Empire

Refugees from Constantinople (mortal and otherwise) scheme to free their fair city from the Venetian-backed Emperor. Emperor Baldwin II faces pressure from the Despot of Epirus, the Emperor of Nicaea and the King of the Bulgars. At this point, Baldwin II controls little outside Constantinople itself. Intrigues among the various successors to the Byzantine Empire will keep a mercenary gainfully employed as long as he wishes to fight.

These intrigues also play out among various Cainite factions. Constantinople's fall killed many Cainites, including Michael the Patriarch. The survivors fled, along with many Greeks, to the various successor states where they plot revenge on the western Cainites who killed their allies and stole their homes. Bishop Alfonzo

of Venice, current Prince of Constantinople, has a precarious hold on the city. Greek Cainites loathe him as an invader, and western Cainites as a champion of the Cainite Heresy. So far, none of the factions has made a forceful move against him, but the balance could turn to an open battle for power at any time. The leaders of the Byzantine successor states have been lending ghouls and childer to Greek armies attacking the Latin Empire.

Asia Minor and the Black Sea are somewhat of a backwater for mages. The Crusaders stripped most of the best libraries when Constantinople was captured in 1204. The Old Faith remains strong in the countryside, intermittently lending a hand to one faction or another against the Latin invaders.

Greece, the Byzantine countryside and the Aegean Islands are home to the Black Furies. Many tribes believe the Wyrm and its Leech minions are responsible for Constantinople's fall (although they also look to the Prophecies of Shadow for answers). Werewolves from other tribes came in the aftermath of the Fourth Crusade to look for enemies. Some stayed and established septs along the coast alongside kinfolk colonies. They too are becoming involved in the struggles for the remnants of Byzantium.

## Outremer

Frederick II returned from his crusade in June 1229, leaving behind unrest and dissent between his supporters and the "native" Crusader factions. A lull has occurred in the ongoing struggle between the Christian colonies and Muslim forces, but it is not actual peace. Crusaders still trickle to Outremer from Europe to demonstrate their faith or to do penance for some great sin.

The Crusades are not going well. Popular enthusiasm has begun to wane. Crusaders are distracted by closer battles in southern France, Iberia and sometimes even Italy. Many of those who went to Outremer to capture power and information from the Muslims have begun to sense the changing wind and have moved their prizes to strongholds in Europe. Others try to fan enthusiasm in the Crusades in hopes of winning further glory.

Even among vampires, werewolves and mages enthusiasm has waned. Whatever glory, knowledge or power one might have found in the early Crusades has already been achieved. Those who remain in the colonies fight to retain their gains, but even they are slowly sending their plunder back to Europe where it will be safe if a swift retreat is necessary.

The Poor Knights long for another Crusade and a popular leader who can draw and hold a powerful army. Frederick II proved a disappointment — a good leader, but excommunicated by the Church over political struggles. A few are looking speculatively at the pious boy-king Louis IX of France. At present, he is needed in Europe. If he proves to be as strong as his grandfather Philippe II Auguste, the knights may have someone to lead them away from the shadowy battlefields of Europe to safeguard Jerusalem once and for all.

## Scandinavia

Scandinavia seems far from the "civilized" courts of Europe, although it is much closer than Constantinople or Jerusalem. No pilgrimage sites draw the curious north. The kingdoms themselves are scarcely Christianized. Scandinavia is the folk land of monsters — and of the Vikings who pillaged Europe not all that long ago. Rumors of civil war drift through the few cities and swirl around the noble courts. European knights and soldiers facing foes raised in the Viking tradition may be horrified to find that ransom is not a strongly established custom; many Scandinavians fight to the death and execute foes.

The population is small and scattered, leaving little room for Cainites. The north is home to the Gangrel, the south to Ventre, Brujah, Lasombra and Toreador, all relative newcomers to the land. Relations between the clans remain tense, with intermittent raids which can easily turn into civil wars.

Similarly, Scandinavia is a stronghold of the Valdaermen and Old Faith mages who defend their isolated chantries from curious outsiders. As in other areas, these powerful crays will not fall easily to the invaders.

Scandinavia is home to the Fenrir. The Fenrir have fought and defeated many of the Cainite *einherjar* who plagued the northern wilds. Their recent victories against the Cainites have made the Fenrir confident of destroying their foes, driving out the Church and returning to the old days when they and their Kinfolk raided and raped across Europe. The dream is hopeless, but the battle will be glorious.

Scandinavia is barely on the Inquisition's list of problems. So much is to be done in Scandinavia that it, like Eastern Europe, is left to isolated cells that are uncovering a problem far larger and older than they expected. As in Eastern Europe, many night-fiends are used to fighting openly in areas that have been theirs for centuries.



# CHAPTER FOUR:

# ASHES AND

# BLOOD

“Flavit deus et dissipati sunt.”  
“God blew, and they were scattered.”  
— Anonymous

**Dark Ages** characters of all types can form power bases around resources, holy ground or simple ancestral territory. The one sure thing that owning land indicates, however, is that some night, someone will want to take it.

The four demesnes that appeared in **Right of Princes** appear here again — and each meets its destruction or usurpation at the hands of another type of character. While a certain amount of “crossover” is therefore unavoidable, we have taken pains to present these “destruction vignettes” from the perspective of the aggressor (as they were presented from the perspective of the “defender” in **Right of Princes**). These vignettes include sidebars giving the names of the important “defending” characters and any pertinent details, but full information, of course, is available in **Right of Princes**.

As before, these vignettes should not be considered “canon”; future books, including any regional sourcebooks that cover these areas, will not make reference to them. They are included purely for purposes of inspiration for players and tools for Storytellers.

# The Fall of the House of Ulf

The events that would ultimately lead to the end of the Raven's Wing cabal of Valdaermen began several years ago in, of all places, the independent states and baronies that had once been a united Poland. It was there that a handful of Cainites banded together into what seemed, at the time, to be a fairly insignificant coterie. They shared no common history, no common bloodline, not even — at least at first — any common goal. No, what bound these four together were the simple facts of their lowly status and their ambition to escape it. For all were of the so-called Low Clans, looked upon with disfavor and disdain by those who hold power in Cainite Society. In these turbulent times, however, even the Low Clans may grab for that power, may rise up and become more than they are, and it was to this cause that these four disparate vampires bound their efforts and their will.

Unfortunately, they had little time in which to birth their intrigues, for the Teutonic Knights, and the Ventre Jürgen who hides among them, turned from their defeat in Hungary and advanced on Poland, there to assist several Polish lords in their war against Prussia. Lord Jürgen is not the sort to tolerate any challenge to his authority, nor were the local Tzimisce *voivodes* likely to accept the presence of an ambitious coterie of the fallen. Faced with enemies on all sides, enemies too powerful to challenge, the coterie chose to flee Poland.

This was, to them, but a temporary setback. As soon as they had sufficient resources to build a force of their own, they would return and claim at least one of the Polish territories as their own, and damn any who said otherwise.

But how to raise monies and resources as vast as those that would be required for such an undertaking?

## The Coterie

It was with a definite sense of irony and defiance that Ludwik Dymitr of Clan Nosferatu suggested the

### ULF'S HALL

**U**lf's house of great wealth, left over from the days of Viking, lies on a tiny, mist-shrouded island just north of a nondescript fishing village in Norway where wizard and commoner alike continue to practice the Old Ways. The hall itself is accessible only to the rune-wise. Those who lack the gift of Odin's sight find themselves led astray upon the foggy waters, usually only to emerge from the mists at the banks from which they departed.

In addition to its power as a cray, Ulf's hall holds a fortune in plunder. Powerful weapons, forged by strong smiths and wielded by great fighters, hang from the walls. Jeweled cups of gold sit upon the table and a drinking horn, torn from a dragon's skull, dangles from Ulf's seat. It is a fortune the likes of which few might ever set eyes upon. Behind the large chair, the runes *Fehu* (possessions) and *Eihwaz* (protection) are carved into the timbers, along with a lengthy warning for the would-be thief, regarding a curse Ulf placed upon the treasure. It is free for the taking to one who would put it to honest ends in service to the All-Father, but it must not be spent frivolously, nor must it be taken in greater sum than is needed for a single endeavor.

A cabal of four Valdaermen dwells in Ulf's hall and watches over its treasures. Brand Grydsson is

the keeper of the hall and is generally regarded as the leader of the cabal, as well as being the most capable magus among them. He is a towering and barrel-chested warrior whose intimidating physical frame conceals a keen and incisive mind.

Gerti Eriksdottir is the wisest of the Valdaermen of the Raven's Wing. She tempers Brand's stubbornness with simple common sense (sometimes disguising it in the form of "divinations" or "signs" if he is being particularly bullheaded on an issue). Gerti is a comely woman and is well loved by the people of the tiny fishing village that has grown up on the coastline near the hall.

Ketil Svensson is a reserved, quiet young man. His black hair is a mark of foreign heritage, but Brand also considers the young man's dark mane to be a sign of the All-Father's favor, as it has the dull sheen of raven's feathers. He has taken on the unofficial position of doling out Ulf's wealth to the other members of the cabal.

One day, Gunnar Nyalsson is likely to take control of Ulf's Hall from Brand. A strapping and powerful youth, he is probably going to outstrip his mentor's physical might when he is fully grown, in a year or two. Gunnar is popular with the townsfolk (most especially the village's few young women), and all feel relaxed and at ease when in his presence.

name "Bar Sinister" to his coterie-mates. Taken from European heraldry, the Bar Sinister is a line emblazoned across an ensign, from upper left to lower right, indicating that the bearer of that ensign is illegitimate. All things considered, it seemed appropriate.

Ludwik is the leader of the Bar Sinister, inasmuch as the coterie recognizes a leader at all. The eldest of the four, the Nosferatu possesses the greatest knowledge of Cainite society and politics, picked up during his many years of skulking and eavesdropping. He is a tiny, twisted creature, barely topping five feet in height, although he might well add a full six inches to that were he capable of standing upright. His face is quite literally lopsided, the left side lower than the right, giving a perpetual tilt to his head. Ludwik's ambition is fueled by spite; he seeks power not for its own sake, but so he might torment those who would torment him merely for what he is.

Tshaya, a young Hungarian peasant, was Embraced into the Clan Tremere by a magus who believed—falsely—that she possessed true powers of prognostication. Despite so inauspicious a beginning, she has advanced rapidly in her studies, and only her aspirations have grown faster than her grasp of Thaumaturgy. She has become a powerful witch, but her knowledge of Cainite ways is limited. Had she not found her companions in the Bar Sinister, she would sooner or later have found herself in trouble she could not easily escape.

Perhaps the most power-hungry of the group, Andreas Andreason is a Malkavian born in Norway but raised and Embraced in England. He is especially driven, and his obsession with advancing his position in Cainite society may well be emblematic of his madman's curse. Andreas does not look the typical Northman—his blond beard is clipped in a stylish goatee, his hair cut short, and his frame lanky rather than powerful. Andreas makes no secret of the fact that he follows Ludwik's leadership only because, for the time being, he has no better ideas.

Finally, and most apparently out of place, is the French Setite Juliote de Sost. Juliote has precious little interest in power for herself, but she requires monies and resources if she is to succeed in her eventual goal of infiltrating one of the Cainite French Courts. Juliote is blonde, ravishingly beautiful—a fact only enhanced by her mastery of Presence—and not at all above using her appearance, or any other advantage she might have, to obtain what she wants.

## Selecting the Target

It was Andreas who, during the coterie's debates over how and where to obtain the necessary resources to make their mark on Cainite society, dimly recalled the rumors, whispers and legends of his childhood. Village gossip, or so he remembered,

maintained that somewhere, far to the north, lay a bastion of the old ways, a rock of Odin worshippers against which the mighty sea of the Roman Church could crash eternally yet never erode. He remembered, too, that this enclave was said to include a great horde of wealth and treasure, the likes of which even kings could scarcely imagine.

The coterie very nearly chose to dismiss the notion. Village gossip, half-remembered at best, of ancient wealth? Hardly worth the effort even of investigating! After a time, however, when other schemes were suggested and rejected, or attempted and failed, the notion began to look more attractive. If nothing else, it was an objective that would not pit them directly against other Cainites. So, with much reluctance and little hope, the Bar Sinister chose to separate for some months, that they might research these fabled riches.

How shocked they were—all save Andreas, of course—when that research paid off! In the archives of the oldest Tremere chantries deep in Hungary, Tshaya found tantalizing hints of a mystic spot of power somewhere off the northern coast of Norway. Little was written of it, as none had proven able to find it—which implied, to Tshaya, not that it didn't exist, but that it was mystically concealed. Ludwik and Andreas, who had gone ahead to Norway to investigate firsthand, required little time to learn that something was out there. Too many sailors reported that they had become temporarily lost, as though befuddled, while sailing a stretch of sea that should be simple enough for experienced seamen.

Thus, the rumors at least partially confirmed, the members of the Bar Sinister exchanged messages, carried by ghouls loyal to Juliote and quickened by Tshaya's use of the Transitus Velociter path, and began to plan.

## Gathering Intelligence

For more than a year did the Bar Sinister watch and plan. The Setite's ghouls continued to travel across the land carrying messages, so that the two halves of the coterie might exchange their discoveries. Ludwik, with his powers of disguise and his mastery over the beasts of the wild, slowly discovered the identity of those who held the great treasure they sought. From the people he learned of strange men and a woman, who would appear at times seeking evidence of Odin worship and the old ways. From the ravens who flocked to the mainland in search of food, he learned that those men lived on the isle in a great hall, and that the citizens of a small fishing village supported them in all things. He learned swiftly that not all the ravens were natural, and that he must avoid those who were the familiars of the wizards. Fortunately, Andreas' own gifts included the power to see haloes, and he could warn Ludwik of which birds were natural and which were not.

Ludwik frequently questioned the birds, and more than once he merged his spirit with one of theirs so he might ride them back and spy on the mysterious island. He learned that three men and one woman made up the entirety of the island's wizards, that their home was called Ulf's Hall. He began to know their personalities, how they behaved, how they would react. He learned that this community of pagans sloughed off the suspicions of the Church by keeping a Christian priest on the island — but that he was, in truth, an Odinist himself and son to the village healer and the brother of the village headman.

He learned, too, that he was not the only one to use the birds as spies. One of the Gangrel also watched the island, along with his companion and thrall, a great wolf. Thrilled, Ludwik included the unknowing Gangrel in their plans.

Perhaps most importantly, he learned that the fabled treasure truly existed, and that it had, over time, grown even larger due to the donations of the faithful.

In the annals of the Tremere chantries and the Temples of Set, Tshaya and Juliote researched the rune-casters among the mages, called the Valdaermen. The Usurpers' records were sparse, for even when they numbered themselves among mortal mages, they rarely dealt amicably with other factions. Still, they learned enough that, in conjunction with Ludwik's intelligence, they could begin to estimate the capabilities of their new enemy. Tshaya was able to warn Ludwik to observe the mages only indirectly and with great care, for Valdaermen magics include the ability to sense magics around them and the power to grant themselves good fortune as well. She warned that whatever plan they concocted could not involve direct conflict, for the northern mages were terrors in battle.

Then, after months of study and observation, all was in readiness. Ludwik sent a final message, instructing Tshaya, Juliote and her ghouls to join them in Norway — but first to make a side-trip through Italy and Greece, searching for one other, very special individual.

## Opening Gambit: The Enemy of My Enemy ...

The first skirmish of a war that the mages do not even know they are involved in required Ludwik, Tshaya and Andreas to set foot upon the island itself. After so many months of study, this was not as difficult a task as it appeared. The Nosferatu had ridden ravens back to the isle on many occasions, in company with others so he wouldn't become lost despite the island's arcane defenses. Between that experience and Andreas' powers of Auspex, the pair was able to maneuver a small boat to the island's shore. Had the mages any

reason to suspect their presence, they might have been detected via magic, so the Cainites were especially careful to avoid drawing suspicion.

There they waited, returning to the mainland only just in time to take shelter from the dawn. They returned again, and again. Finally, many nights after they had begun, Andreas' Soulsight detected the Gangrel's essence, merged with that of a raven so he might once again spy upon the mages. Ludwik took the form of Brand Grydsson, the leader of those who dwelt in Ulf's Hall. Making a point of stepping into view of the raven, to ensure the Gangrel saw him, he raised a hand ...

And Tshaya, standing out of view, called upon the power of her blood magics to boil the raven's blood, killing the creature. It would, they knew, take the Gangrel some time to recover, and some time was all they needed.

The next night, guided by the beasts of the forests, Ludwik led the others on a hunt for the Gangrel's wolf ghoul. It, too, was slain by magic, and some of the Valdaermen's runes left carved in the trees nearby.

Several more nights passed, and Ludwik kept careful watch on the Gangrel through animals' eyes. The Feral vampire was, as expected, enraged to discover the carcass of his beloved companion, and, given his experience with the raven on the isle, leapt to the obvious conclusion: the mages had discovered his presence and attacked him. One of the Gangrel's prowess had little difficulty in acquiring a boat from a nearby village, and he set off toward the island. He, too, had made the journey often enough as a raven to find his way through the isle's defenses, although it took him longer to do so without the mystic sight of the Malkavian.

This was a good thing, for the Bar Sinister knew they must reach the island first. Tshaya and Juliote made their way toward the village well, the primary source of clean water for nearly every inhabitant of the island. Their activities are detailed below. In the interim, moving silently and invisibly, Ludwik crept into the home of the village herbalist, mother of the false priest, and murdered her in her sleep with a dagger, leaving deep slashing wounds all over the body.

When Andreas, staring far out to sea, reported that the Gangrel drew near, he let out a cry of "Murder!" in Norwegian, just before the Bar Sinister took to their own boat. As the villagers were all asleep, no one recognized that the voice that awakened them was unfamiliar.

From the boat, Ludwik watched through the eyes of another raven as events unfolded on the island.

As planned, Brand and the other mages were quickly drawn out of the hall to the village by the hue and cry, as the healer's body was discovered. They were there still when the Gangrel, very nearly in the midst of frenzy, arrived on shore. The mages were just as swift to assume the vampire's guilt as he was theirs, and the resulting confrontation proved bloody indeed.

Unfortunately, although Brand himself was badly mauled, only the Gangrel was slain by the battle's end. This, however, was but a minor setback, for the coterie needed merely wait and watch what happened next.

## Second Assault: The Red Death

The coterie's second assault came swiftly after the Gangrel's attack, for it was already in place when he and the mages did battle. Recall the Tremere's visit to the village well. Recall, too, that on her way to Norway, she first traveled to Italy and Greece.

She was, in fact, searching for a mortal in the early stages of cholera, called the Red Death. Even in these dark and unenlightened times, many educated men and women know that the Red Death can be transmitted through the wastes of sick individuals, as well as through water. It was difficult to move so sick an individual from Italy to Norway in the weeks it takes the disease to run its course — practically impossible, by normal means. Tshaya, however, again made skillful use of her Thaumaturgical gifts, assuring that they reached Norway while her charge still lived, although he was hardly comfortable.

While Ludwik was committing murder, Tshaya and Juliote were smearing the sick man's feces on both the handle and the interior of the well bucket. It would wash off eventually — but not swiftly enough.

When the cabal of wizards refreshed themselves and quenched their thirst after the battle with the Gangrel, when they washed Brand's wounds in hopes of preventing infection, it was with water from the only nearby source, as the Bar Sinister knew it must be. The people in the village were also contaminated; unfortunate, for they would have made a convenient source of vitae, but necessary to the coterie's plans.

Cholera strikes swiftly. The magics of the Valdaermen allow the wizards to tamper with fortune itself, granting themselves exceptional luck. Had he been wounded only, or diseased only, Brand would almost certainly have recovered. When the disease struck at a body already weakened by massive injury, however, there was little even the mages could do. The first of the cabal fell to the vampire's invisible siege.

## Third Assault: Ambush in the Dark

This next stage would require a bit of good luck on the vampires' part. They knew that the surviving wizards, after using their magics to speed their own recovery from the Red Death, would do their best to aid their fellow Odinists in the village. Most of that aid would probably



take the form of mundane treatment, rest and fluids and herbs, but they would use magics as well. Almost certainly, after making such efforts while still suffering from the lingering affects of the disease themselves, they'd be exhausted, mentally and physically.

If they all returned to Ulf's Hall before the sun set, the coterie's opportunity would never come. If they did not ...

A handful of nights later, the vampires arrived on the western shore and crept, unseen and unheard, onto the island. Ludwik spoke with the beasts and learned that one of the wizards—the woman, Gerti Eriksdottir—remained late in the village, treating the sick, while the others had returned to the hall.

Gerti was a warrior, a powerful sorceress, and had she been at strength, even the four vampires would have been hard-pressed to slay her without losing some of their number in exchange. That night, still sick, worn out from the labors of the past days, faced with Tshaya's Thaumaturgical might and Ludwik's overpowering strength, she never stood a chance.

The Nosferatu once more summoned the beasts of the island, though he left the ravens uncalled, for fear of attracting the attention of the wizards' familiars. By the time Gerti's corpse was found, not enough would be left to determine how she died.

Two mages were dead now, and still they didn't even know they were at war.

## Fourth Assault: Bloodshed in the Village

On the night following the funeral pyres for Brand, Gerti and several villagers who had died swiftly of a disease unknown to those who lived this far north, the village's false priest experienced a powerful vision. In the dark, an angel of the Christian God appeared before him. Her hair was radiant gold, her beauty exquisite beyond mortal comprehension, the very air around her awash with power and majesty. She informed him, her voice unbearably sad and tears of blood running down her cheeks, that the disease that had struck the island so suddenly was the wrath of God Himself. He had finally grown angered at their stubborn insistence on clinging to the old ways, their refusal to accept God and Christ into their lives and their hearts. She had come to him, he who knew the Christian ways even if he did not yet honor them, in a final attempt to save the village. God was merciful. He did not wish to smite them all. They could still save themselves—if they turned from their pagan ways and drove the rune-carvers from their midst.

He did not believe, not at first. His faith in Odin and the old gods was great. But Juliote appeared to him night after night, her powers of persuasion and her magnificent Presence slowly wearing down his resolve,

even as the disease sickened more and more of his brethren. She appeared to others as well, though far less frequently. Slowly, a small but growing portion of the population began to grumble, and to wonder, and to cast suspicious glances toward Ulf's Hall.

Still, nothing would have come of it. The talk, though loud and angry, would have faded but a few days after Juliote stopped appearing to them, for the villagers' beliefs in Odin and their friendship with the mages of the hall was strong. The Bar Sinister, however, had no intention of letting it lie.

The night after the rebellious whispers had reached their peak, several of the men who had spoken most loudly of the wrath of God and a possible change of life for the village were burned alive in their homes by a fire that came from nowhere, that had no obvious cause.

The people gathered in the middle of town, in a night lit only by the blazing huts, and shouted angrily at one another. Was this the wrath of the gods, directed at those who preached betrayal of the old ways? Or was it the action of the wizards, punishing any who dared speak out against them?

Through the throng crept Andreas, and madness spread in his wake. Where there had been confusion, there was now certainty; where there had been anger, murderous rage. Fed and fueled by the Malkavian's power, debate became argument, argument became violence. Men and women who had lived together and worked together for all their lives drew knives and swords and rakes and shovels upon one another, and shed blood.

The surviving wizards were no fools. When they heard the sounds of battle from the village, when their familiars told them that their people fought among themselves, they knew the cause could not be natural cause. Calling upon the power of Odin's runes, they were able to detect that a foreign magic was indeed active upon their isle, and they realized, finally, that all that had befallen them was no accident, but a deliberate act of aggression.

Still, what were they to do? They could not leave their loyal friends to slaughter one another. So, leaving his younger companion to guard the hall, raven-haired Ketil Svensson set out to the village, prepared to restore order and discover his enemy by whatever means necessary, be it reason, violence or magic.

Ketil never reached the village. Halfway from Ulf's Hall, one of the villagers—their leader, the brother of the priest—stumbled up to him and collapsed at his feet, his face bloodied. The mage, worried for his friend, bent down to help him and received a dagger in his throat for his troubles. Ludwik's disguise faded even as the life pumped from the wizard's throat, and the

Nosferatu waved, signaling his companions in hiding. It was time to finish it.

## Endgame

As his coterie gathered about him, Ludwik raised his hands to the heavens and summoned the ravens of the isle, no longer caring if the mages' familiars heard — in fact, he hoped they would come. He knew he could not control those, for they were not true beasts, but spirits in avian form; still, he could influence the real ravens. So he did, demanding that they turn upon their unnatural brethren, setting raven against raven, animal against spirit.

Not all did as he demanded, for they had long known their unnatural flock-mates and were resistant to harming them. Still, the Nosferatu's will was strong, and enough of the birds did as he bade them. Few of the familiars were slain, but they were driven away, depriving the lone surviving wizard of their support.

It was Andreas, speaking in the local tongue, who stepped forward at the very door to the hall and delivered their ultimatum in his booming voice.

"Gunnar, son of Nyal! You are alone! Your companions are dead, and you were the youngest and weakest of them! Your people are sick, weakened, fighting among themselves! Even your spirit allies have fled! Surrender your holding, and all within, and you may yet live through this night! What say you?"

Here the Bar Sinister made their one critical error. The average Cainite, in Gunnar's position, would likely have surrendered, hoping to survive the night and take his revenge at a future time. But Gunnar was no Cainite. The coterie had not counted upon the fanatic devotion of the mages to their cause, their beliefs and their gods. Gunnar Nyalsson did indeed emerge from the hall — but he emerged with Brand's great sword gripped in both hands, the power of the runes blazing through his frame, his armor, his weapons. With a great cry, he fell upon his undead enemy. His sword struck true time and again, and their own weapons seemed cursed with ill luck, unable to land. He simply slipped through many of their supernatural assaults as a shark glides through water, yet they were unable to so easily resist his.

In the end, as dawn approached, sheer numbers carried the battle and Gunnar was laid low — but beside his bloodied corpse was the torpid body of Ludwik and the scattered ashes of a beheaded Juliot. Andreas and Tshaya, injured and shocked, dragged the Nosferatu through the doors — they would decide later if they would take him, leave him or kill him outright — and moved to find shelter in Ulf's Hall before the rising of the sun.

In later nights, they would find they still had to deal with a vengeful spirit and a powerful curse attached to their treasure, but for our purposes, this tale is concluded.

## The Remnants of the Bar Sinister

### Andreas Andreason, Lord in Waiting

10th-generation Malkavian, childe of William Weaver, walker on the Road of Kings

**Nature:** Barbarian

**Demeanor:** Autocrat

**Embrace:** AD 1139

**Apparent Age:** Late 20s

**Background:** Born in a nameless fishing village in Norway, Andreas would likely have followed in his father's rather tame footsteps and become a farmer had fortune not thrown an opportunity in his lap. When he was in his mid-teens, a merchant vessel — Andreas knew few languages and nothing of geography at the time, so to this night he remains ignorant of the crew's nationality — put in near his village to repair the sail, damaged in a sudden squall. Andreas, overcome by curiosity, stowed aboard and actually managed to remain undiscovered until the ship made port once more, on the British Isles. Andreas was fascinated by the strange and exotic vision that was London and spent many years there dwelling in poverty, but learning the languages and the practices of civilization.

Unfortunately, the single strongest conclusion Andreas came to was that civilization was the cause of much misery and poverty, and that the ways of his own people were far superior. He took to lamenting this fact to anyone who would speak to him. To his surprise, a man he met one night seemed to listen intently, even to agree, and then he asked if Andreas would like both the time and the means to work at restoring mankind to its "natural" state. Andreas, unsure what he was getting into, nonetheless agreed and was Embraced that night.

Whether Andreas was mad before the stranger met him may be questionable, but after years under William's tutelage, he certainly must be now. He is a Cainite of contradictions, unsure of what he's doing in the world. Although he decries the decadence of society and seeks a return to older ways, he follows the Road of Kings, convinced that the Cainites can use power and authority in society to lead mortals back to years gone by. Although he openly craves leadership and only grudgingly followed Ludwik for lack of anything better to do, in his unbeatng heart and what remains of his soul, he desires nothing more than a return to the simple,

mortal life he abandoned one night for a strange and foreign ship.

**Image:** Tall and lanky but not skinny, Andreas does not look Norse in any way except the construction of his facial features. His hair and beard are both cut short, his beard neatly clipped into a goatee. He disdains fancy clothes, preferring to dress in whatever garments are most comfortable and provide the most freedom of movement. When he goes armed, he carries a Norse ax, one of the few possessions he still has from before the ship.

## Tshaya, the Witch

9th-generation Tremere, childe of Nikolai Brust, walker on the Road of Humanity

**Nature:** Pedagogue

**Demeanor:** Caretaker

**Embrace:** AD 1159

**Apparent Age:** Late teens

**Background:** Just another villager in southern Hungary, Tshaya dwelt in a small village that had the misfortune to sit in the shadow of a Tzimisce *voivode*'s keep. By the time she was seven, the girl had already provided at least one meal for the Fiend, and both her parents had died beneath his fangs by the time she was 12. Tshaya would likely have lived her entire (short) life in that village if she had not taken to conversing with a small group of strangers who would occasionally pass through town. She took to one in particular, a handsome young man (or so he seemed) named Nikolai. To him she told her dreams, her dreams of a life away from here, and when he

expressed an interest in those dreams, she began to weave colorful tales for him, stories of faraway places and future days. It was never her intention to deceive him, simply to keep his attention, but she unknowingly convinced him that she might indeed possess the gift of prognostication. That would be a useful tool indeed, when the Tremere — for that was who these strangers were — made a move to destroy the Tzimisce *voivode* and claim the land for their own. Tshaya was Embraced soon after, but Nikolai all but tossed her aside when he learned her "gifts" were false.

Still, others of the clan begin to teach Tshaya in the ways of the Cainites and of blood magic, and the young woman took to the latter lessons much more readily than the former. She didn't care about politics, wars or geography, only about gaining the power she had lacked as a mortal. She struck out on her own far earlier than her mentors would have liked and would most probably have found herself in serious trouble due to her ignorance and naiveté had she not fallen in with the Bar Sinister.

**Image:** Tshaya is dusky of skin with dark eyes and black hair. She is tall, thin to the point of being gangly and rather too horse-faced to be considered particularly pretty. She would prefer to dress in a manner "befitting her station" — that is, covered in arcane symbols and announcing her mastery of magics for all to see — but her companions have convinced her that a simple tunic and skirt would be a wiser choice.

## Bright Promise Shattered

A single group of mages from the Old Faith ousted the werewolves of the Sept of the Bright Promise in Acre. They did not expect to; it was hardly even a goal. Through a combination of cunning, external forces and sheer luck, the mages caused the werewolves' house of cards to fall.

## Ancient History

The real story begins a long time ago, on the isle of Cyprus. More than 14 centuries ago, the Cypriots (and, more specifically, their kings) were under Persian rule. The King of Salamis supported this rule, as it filled his coffers graciously. The king had a brother named Onesilos, however, who allied himself with the Greek Ionians to throw off the fetters placed upon them by the Persians. So Onesilos led (at first) a quiet rebellion. As the conspiracy grew, more Cypriots joined in the cause to overthrow Persian rule. Those allied with the cause identified themselves with a specially forged coin, a mockery of the King's Persian coin. More coins were crafted and handed out as the rebellion grew, and one



## THE SEPT OF THE BRIGHT PROMISE

A pack of young werewolves, led by a Venetian called Aldo di Venezia (or Golden-Fangs-of-Dawn, among his people) vies for the same power that the Cult of Lamashlu does. The Sept of the Bright Promise is under conservative leadership, and Aldo's pack wishes to branch out, make contact with other werewolves and above all bring in money and notoriety for the sept. Thirteen-Stars-Falling, the Sept Leader, does not share these views, and while he and the pack have never fought directly, the tension between them creates a window through which an enemy could attack.

Aldo's pack includes:

IsabeauduLaurent ("Unbreaking-Stone"), a French noblewoman who came to Outremer with her Kinfolk husband. She is an Ahroun of the Warders, and at least as canny and ambitious as Aldo.

Ishmael ("Steps-in-Shadow"), a young Ragabash of the Children of Gaia. Ishmael is a street thief and is quite knowledgeable about the city and its meaner inhabitants.

Simon ben Levi ("Brother-to-Steel"), a former blacksmith and a Theurge of the Warders of Men.

Rising-River, a metis Galliard (naturally a Child of Gaia — few other tribes would suffer a metis to live). Nearly mute, Rising-River is an accomplished lore keeper and has a near-perfect memory.

day almost a year later, the conspiracy they had been fomenting burst, and what was once a quiet rebellion turned into a series of violent battles between the rebelling Cypriots (alongside their allies, the Ionians) and the Persians. The rebellion was not enough; it was quashed over a matter of days. Most involved were killed in battle or executed by the Persians, and Onesilos was one of the ones killed in battle — almost.

An arrow felled Onesilos on the deck of his warship, and as he lay there, the sounds of battle fading as his blood pooled on the oaken deck, a vision came to him. First it was a woman's voice, but it wasn't long before an ethereal body appeared, a shimmering female specter whose flesh rippled like water. She told him that she was Lamashlu, a goddess drowned beneath the sea for treachery against her mother, Tiamat. As Onesilos' life crept away, she explained to him that she could wake again and become strong, but only if she had those who would believe in her, worship her, need her. If Onesilos agreed to be her mouthpiece in the world, then in return she would use what little was left of her power to reinvigorate his failing body with life. Onesilos agreed.

## The Cult of Lamashlu

Onesilos, brought back from the brink of death, fled Cyprus on a small boat and, over the next decade, gathered followers to his side who would join him in the worship of this drowned goddess. These followers identified themselves as those rebelling against the Persians did: by a handful of the coins forged by Onesilos to oppose his brother. Over time, the mystery cult dedicated to the worship of the inscrutable goddess Lamashlu gained number and power.

Lamashtu opened the doors to her most prized worshippers and taught them how to utilize the ebb and flow of power present in the world, manipulating it to strengthen the fabric of reality or to reduce it to dust and decay. She came to her most devoted "children" in visions and flashes of almost-alien insight. Her most prized student was still Onesilos, who continued to live and breathe despite his increasing age and decrepitude of flesh. By the time Onesilos was 120 years of age, Lamashtu came to him in her most overt display yet. She showed him a luminescent, many-armed being run through with black, pulsing veins. The white light from her form blinded Onesilos, and she explained that in blindness, in the destruction of his sight, true wisdom could be found. With that she demanded that he find a source of magic, a wellspring where lines of power crossed over one another. There, she explained, he would build a vessel for her: a box that would contain her "heart" and grant her and her followers a greater breadth of power. When the visitation ceased, Onesilos set about his task with great vigor, and despite his blindness he found the source of power that would become her home: the city of Akko, or what would come to be known as Acre, in the land of Outremer.

## The Heart of Lamashlu

The box, an ark very similar in design and proportion to the Judaic Ark of the Covenant, was never finished. In 379 BC, the town of Akko was invaded by a small contingent of Persians who clogged the city's port with a flotilla of small warships. Onesilos and a few of his most-trusted men worked hour upon hour in the building that would eventually house the Heart of Lamashlu, but it wasn't long before the Persian incursion burst into the building, murdering Onesilos' helpers and leaving him imprisoned. His imprisonment lasted as long as the Persian invasion, no more than a few scant months, but it was long enough to leave him depressed and ailing, his body ridden hard to the point of collapse. Lamashtu's power was waning (many of her worshippers had died in the attack), and she could not stay death from Onesilos. He died, and with him her chances for "rebirth."

## LAMASHTU

Lamashtu is a demon who has been slumbering, unable to awake for long without sufficient worship and an appropriate anchor for her spirit. She was “daughter” (really more of a servant) to another demon called Tiamat. Lamashtu sold herself to the Assyrians as a goddess of death, her name translating directly as “She Who Erases.” Her mistress and mother, Tiamat, did not like her child growing so independent and constantly attempted to undo Lamashtu’s plans, which led the two elder demons into constant conflict. Lamashtu made a singular gambit to destroy her elder by convincing another demon from the south (who called himself Marduk but existed by many other names) that Tiamat was moving against his holdings. Marduk helped Lamashtu break her bond and destroy the mother, but one of Tiamat’s last actions was to wipe out Lamashtu’s worshippers in a flash flood. So Lamashtu drowned beneath the waters, and she has lain dormant beneath the waters for many millennia, occasionally stirring enough dregs of divine power to call to an unwitting mortal in a demonic bargain. Her biggest success was the rebel Onesilos, but his failure (and the eventual growth of neoteric faiths like Christianity and Islam) left her without a foothold. This has changed with Burrhus and his cabal. Should Lamashtu awaken, she has little interest in the fortunes of her charges and seeks little more than erasing all of creation.

which Onesilos once traveled down. Of these cultists, four were mages of the Old Faith, seekers of inscrutable secrets once given to the Old Gods of the land: deities of Babylon and Sumer who they hoped could unlock the true mysteries that the universe contained. The cult did not begin as worshippers of Lamashtu, and in truth they had never even heard her name, much less what she desired. It wasn’t long before her siren’s song of power-for-life could be heard on the winds, and soon the cult had converted.

## The Cult

Burrhus Malavazos, a scheming old man who has grown cold and tired in his later years, leads the cult. Where once he was a willing sycophant to Lamashtu’s desires, he now is simply weary of his servitude and contemplates the day when he may drop off this mortal coil (though Lamashtu certainly has other notions).

Burrhus, still running his merchant vessel across the Mediterranean waters, has another cult member in his first mate, a woman called Amena el-Abiad. Amena, also a mage of the Old Faith, crops her hair short and speaks with a forcibly deep voice to uphold her masquerade as a young man. Amena is still young and eager in her service to the goddess Lamashtu but is torn over watching her leader (and consort) grow embittered. Mostly, however, her domain lies in the recruitment of new worshippers to serve as cultists under the goddess. She is charismatic and targets younger men who can not only serve willingly but are strong of body in case the cult needs someone to perform physical labor. (When speaking with Burrhus, she often calls these male cultists “pack mules” in her Arabic tongue.)

The last mage of the cult is an exiled knight from a small village outside of Magdeburg called Adler Fleisch. Fleisch is a quiet man and is able to blend in among the European Crusaders with little to no problem. His features are unexceptional and he is neither overtly large nor small, and as such he serves as something of a reconnaissance man across the water in Outremer. Few know him, and he maintains a very small number of connections (though Adler does bring one or two truly unusual allies to the table).

The other two cultists are commoners and remain only as prominent mortal retainers. The first is Amena’s brother, a Cypriot leper named Marzouq (ironically meaning “fortunate”). Marzouq is aware of his sister’s nature as a mage, and both she and Burrhus believe that to serve Lamashtu will not only eventually grant him the ability to wield magic, but also give him the blessing to cure himself of his affliction. He serves the cult with a martyr’s tenacity. The other mortal knows nothing about the magical nature of his leaders, only

## Anno Domini 1230

In the current day, the nexus of magical lines sits in what is now a large building in the city of Acre, next door to an open-air market. Thousands of people orbit these lines, and only a scant few are aware that the lane is anything at all, any degree of preternatural power hidden within plain sight. The werewolves who worship there certainly do, as this nexus provides the beast-men with a caern deep in the heart of Acre.

The caern itself is a bustling center of modern religions and European Crusader mentality. While the local dominance of Islam is still felt, the city grows by leaps and bounds as European Christians begin angling for a slice of the Holy Land and a piece of the burgeoning trade routes. No one in the city had heard of Lamashtu or her cult; after all, in all of history the cult was a forgotten ripple in a very big pond. On the isle of Cyprus, things were somewhat different, as a small cluster of cultists were traversing a path similar to that

that they wield much personal power and assure him that his choice of abandoning the tenets of Islam will eventually net him a breadth of material wealth. Mohammad Bizar is his name, and he is an immense man who fulfills the role of physical guardian and warder on cult missions. He is somewhat slow of thought and easily manipulated.

The cult itself is not limited to these individuals. In fact, in the year previous to their surreptitious assault upon Acre, the group counted 17 others among its numbers. All are mortals, many of whom are tired and oppressed dockworkers, sailors and copper miners. Recruitment is simple; Amena flashes some gold, reveals to them carvings and crumbling friezes of Lamashu and her power, and works some magic meant to make their minds more malleable. The cult itself operates out of the copper mines on Cyprus, working and living deep in the bowels of the red, rusty-walled stone passages.

## Lamashu's Command

After a year or so of worship, Lamashu renewed her quest once more to claim the spiritual center of Acre, as it was the only place of power within reasonable proximity that would allow her to gain a more prominent (and permanent) foothold in the physical world. Besides, buried beneath the earth was the Heart of Lamashu, the box Onesilos began building to house her divine form. Burrhus sequestered himself away for a few weeks to fast and devote prayer and plea to Lamashu, and in the process he opened his mind to the Old Faith magics of Summer and let his spirit travel the lines of power to their nexus at Acre. After much such investigation, he determined an unfortunate fact about this area of wisdom and energy, which was that a bunch of beast-men were using the area for their own twisted purpose, leeching energy that was rightfully Lamashu's. The question became how to pry the beast-men's grip from this much-needed source of power?

## Gerlach Black-Paw

Enter Adler Fleisch. During his time in Acre and Tyre, Adler had spent much time finding debauchery wherever possible (chewing *qat* leaves with traders, having dalliances with secret prostitutes), and often he spent time sleeping on the streets, going as unnoticed as his lifestyle and his magic would allow. One individual always noticed him and harangued him, seeing through the obfuscating magics. Adler would learn that this "man" was actually a disfigured shape-changer known as Gerlach Black-Paw. The wolf-man was mad, that much was clear. Only sometimes would the creature (whose face was a slough of sagging skin and whose hands were immense and darkly scarred) make sense,

and during these times Adler and the beast-man discovered that they were actually born near one another in the Harz Mountains.

After Burrhus' magic uncovered the other beast-men, Adler mentioned his connections to the lunatic Black-Paw in Acre. The mages decided to offer an alliance to the werewolf. Black-Paw would provide them with as much information about these other werewolves as possible, and in return the crazy wolf-man asked for one, simple thing once it was all over: the severed head of the shape-shifter known as Thirteen-Stars-Falling. The mages agreed (not knowing what this really required of them), and the bargain was struck. Three weeks later, Black-Paw came to them on Cyprus and told them everything he knew.

## Domino Effect

The plan was largely Amena's. Having no perception of the trials that lay before them, her plot was simple and direct. She would concoct a poison to slay the beasts that guarded the sought-after nexus of power, and her brother Marzouq would administer the toxin. The beast-men would die a relatively quick death, the mages would enter the building that housed the energy while the external citizenry was distracted, and they would hold their position through the use of magic. Anyone who questioned their right to be there (as all cultists would be present, digging into the earth for the source of power) would end up at the receiving end of Adler's Autumn magics. The magics would calm those who would dare go against them, quietly "suggesting" that they wouldn't be long, that they were harmless, and that they deserved nothing more than to be left alone. Once they had the incomplete box (the "Heart of Lamashu"), Burrhus incorrectly believed that they would own the source of power and they could take it wherever they desired, likely back to the Cypriot copper mines.

It worked differently in practice, however. Amena concocted a poison crafted out of *amanita* mushrooms, using a combination of Summer and Winter magics to awaken a virulent poison within the fungi. Marzouq, housing himself at one of the leprosaria of the Order of St. Lazarus, would use a simple tarnished ring with a barb extending from it to administer the poison to the first beast-man he saw and would continue the process over days until the wild wolf-men were all dead. Lining up with the rest of the lepers demanding handouts along the market lanes, he began shadowing one of the men earlier identified by the mages' spells as a beast-man, and while wailing and bemoaning his leprous fate he punctured the beast-man's skin just below the wrist as he wrung the monster's hands in misery.



Amena believed her poison would kill a few minutes after delivery, but she had no concept of the vitality of a werewolf's body. That's not to say the poison did not work ... it just didn't kill the Garou, who happened to be the Sept Leader, Thirteen-Stars-Falling. The poison left the body of the werewolf undamaged, but it quickly polluted his mind, unhinging the doors that contained the creature's Rage. The man shifted into a horrific whirlwind of claws and teeth and began attacking the patrons of the marketplace, rending flesh and snapping bones. It was a gory display, and a dozen or so were felled before Hospitaler Knights came pouring in, swords at the ready. Then many of them died, though eventually the struggle ceased as the werewolf was dismembered and beheaded in the middle of the market, surrounded by a swath of death and destruction. In the end, Marzouq was also dead, rent to ribbons by the furious talons of the beast-man.

Amena and Adler watched all of this with grim fascination. It did not cause any evacuation of the place-of-power as they had hoped, however, and over the following weeks an unforeseen power struggle occurred, and the Heart of Lamashtu was further invaded by another group of beast-men (whom Black-Paw would identify as Aldo di Venezia's pack), who secured the area with alarming alacrity. They

believed they were back at square one, and despair assailed Amená over the death of her brother. Soon Lamashtu's whispers came back to them (for her contact was weak and sporadic) and directed Burrhus to turn monster against monster, the faithful against the faithful. Or, more specifically, turn the Crusaders against the wolf-men.

It took no magic at all to direct the military order of the Hospitaler Crusaders to investigate claims that "Islamic occultists" had taken hold of the marketplace. They recognized that this beast-man di Venezia looked human enough and could pass for a Christian with little problem, and so more magical effort was needed. Amená turned again to the same poison she had used before, but this time armed with the foreknowledge of what it would do. When Aldo met with the Hospitalers (all smiles and handshakes), Adler armed Mohammed Bizar with a bow and arrow laced with Amená's toxin, and when Aldo took the Knight General into the marketplace for dates and tea, Bizar sat on the roof of the nearby leprosarium and fired the arrow into di Venezia's shoulder. It took a moment for the Knight General to register what had happened, but by that time Aldo was out of control, his Rage overtaking him

and pushing him to the monstrous war-form that the mages had seen before. Aldo did not fall to the Crusaders, and in fact he escaped the scene. The three pack members who remained fought off the Crusaders and grimly wounded the Knight General in the fray. The final three (Isabeau, Rising-River and Steps-in-Shadow) were brought low by their most deadly weakness. After the previous marketplace “attack” waged by Thirteen-Stars-Falling, some of the more superstitious Christian soldiers had opted to carry silvered weapons. These blades allowed the men to slay Rising-River and Steps-in-Shadow, though Isabeau proved to be a deadly, nigh-unstoppable beast. She could not escape, however; bleeding from multiple wounds and her Rage sapped by Alder’s Winter Pillar, she collapsed into her natural form and was taken away, bound in blessed chains and silver.

It was not long before the Hospitaler knights bolstered their troops with reinforcements from neighboring Cyprus and Jerusalem and launched a campaign to root “malefic influences” from the marketplace. Many Muslims were removed from the area in the ensuing weeks, and the marketplace was temporarily closed (causing significant ripples in the city’s economy). The lingering members of the sept were not enough to assume proper defense and control of the caern. What few remained left to exist on the fringes of the city, waiting for the appropriate time to retake their holy site from the interloping mortal knights.

## The Last Domino

The knights provided the last obstacle for the cultists. The knights had previously been directed as a weapon against the mages’ opponents, and now the knights were the opponents. They manned the marketplace, including the empty building the cultists sought, with numerous guards in an effort to squash any heathens trying to usurp control.

Once again, Adler’s ability with mind-molding magic would come to their aid. These knights were mere mortals, unprotected by magics of their own, confident that their newly gilded silver daggers would ward off the pagans, but Amena knew that no blade could stop Adler from enchanting the men’s minds with his powers. Using a combination of Autumn and Winter magics (a rote Adler calls “Fear of the Goddess Heart;” Autumn 2, Winter 2), the mage convinced the knights of the marketplace that much to fear was here, and he overwhelmed their minds with terrible despair. Adler also instilled in them one simple command for them to follow: “Leave the marketplace, for no good will ever come

of you being there.” It worked. The knights left the marketplace, one by one, until one night it was still and silent. The cultists of Lamashtu made their move and entered the empty building.

## Complications

They expected an “in and out” scenario. They’d dig up the Heart and carry it away with them. It was morning before they realized that the power was contained within the area, not within the Heart. In fact, for the Heart to maintain power it had to be held (and finished) there at the very nexus of power. The mages, uncertain as to what to do, threw up invisible walls of protection using their magics and physically attempted to “hold” the building as their own, obscuring it from outside meddling.

They have new problems. While they currently maintain a tenuous grip on the area as the cultists struggle to finish the Heart of Lamashtu with what sketchy plans they have, exterior forces seek to usurp control yet again. Werewolves who escaped the pogrom at Acre (including Aldo) will surely seek to reclaim the spiritual center that they once held dear. The Hospitalers, too, are unlikely to remain in the dark. Their strange and sudden aversion to the marketplace combined with the aberrations that assaulted the marketplace make good reasons to leak word to the Inquisition. Finally, one more enemy waits in the ranks—Gerlach Black-Paw, who never *did* get the severed head he demanded. He considers the bargain (and the mage’s lives) forfeit in his addled mind, and he waits for them in the darkened place of Acre.

## Burrhus Malavazos

**Nature:** Defender

**Demeanor:** Pedagogue

**Fellowship:** Old Faith

**Background:** Malavazos is a Greek-born spice merchant who was captain of a fat-bellied trade vessel. The ability to work magic came to him late in life, and at first his worship turned to the gods of his ancestry: Aphrodite, Hermes, Hephaestus. A fever waylaid him deep into his 40th year of life, and as he bled from his eyes and mouth while teetering on the edge of life and death, Lamashtu came, offering him a doorway back to life, if only he would spread word of her existence. Burrhus reluctantly continues to build the cult. He is faithful to Lamashtu but wonders somewhere in the back of his mind if he did not make a grievous error once upon a time in choosing to serve her.

**Image:** A swarthy, large man with the hair at his temples turning gray, Burrhus is a curmudgeonly, daunt-



ing figure. Rarely smiling, his eyes sit beneath folds of pinched, leathery skin as he scrutinizes everything. He dresses mostly in drab clothing.

### Amena el-Abiad

**Nature:** Celebrant

**Demeanor:** Defender

**Fellowship:** Old Faith

**Background:** Amena's life was destroyed by disease. While she herself was never ill, her mother and father died of blood poisoning, and her brother was ravaged by leprosy. It was the key to her freedom, however, because while her brother stayed behind in Acre, she ventured forth to Cyprus where she first became Burrhus' consort and later his first mate after displaying a verve he hadn't seen before. Pretending to be a young boy (and, later, a man), she served aboard his trader vessel, traveling the Mediterranean and delighting in the places she was able to visit. She adores Burrhus and follows his every command. She also adores the cause of Lamashtu, finding that it gives her purpose. Currently she serves as both a strategist and recruiter for the mystery cult.

**Image:** To appear male, Amena has cut her hair short, chews her fingernails to the nubs and sometime even sports a fake beard that she cuts from her brother's unshaven face. She is often dirty, both to



help hide any natural feminine beauty she has (which is considerable) and to help her appear on the same level as the workers and serfs she attempts to recruit.

### Adler Fleisch

**Nature:** Survivor

**Demeanor:** Gallant

**Fellowship:** Old Faith

**Background:** Fleisch wasn't very good at doing what people demanded of him. As a knight outside



Magdeburg, he didn't approve of being called up to war, didn't care for currying horses or sharpening blades and ultimately attended to his own business. Unfortunately, his own business included thieving precious items while their owners were away in skirmishes and wars. Adler was lazy and overconfident and was caught one day. The town sentenced him to be stoned in the center of his small village, Rotfeld. He had no intention of suffering such a fate and set out in the world as a sort of journeyman, making whatever coin he could through meager tasks, winnowing any fortune he could make on a stolid, blissful existence. Some of this changed a few years after stumbling into the Holy Land. After spending a few weeks on the isle of Cyprus, he ate some bad lamb and almost died on the rocky beach. Lamashtu called to him and promised him life and bliss once more, and he decided that he little left to lose. While he still doesn't enjoy the prospect of being told what to do, he recognizes that he's serving a power greater than himself who granted him life. His magic is a means to an end, and any spiritual affiliation he previously held was a lie. Now, at the very least, he believes in Lamashtu and what she can offer him.

**Image:** Adler is nondescript, tousled brown hair and dark eyes. His skin is tanned enough to blend in with the Arabic culture, and yet he's still white enough to pass among Northerners. He keeps his shoulders slumped and his head down, but his eyes are always up, keeping his gaze firmly fixed on his surroundings.

## Strood's Salvation

An unfortunate exsanguination lead to the salvation of Strood and the destruction of the demons infesting it. A body was found on the Watling Road, half-buried in the falling snow. The body was beaten, its skin split, the muscle layer frozen where exposed. The blood was gone ... nary a drop was left within the corpse flesh. While this in and of itself would be enough to attract unwanted attention, something was worse: The body belonged to the clergyman Father Alwyn.

## Murder

Why was Father Alwyn murdered? Alwyn, previously ignorant in his old age, discovered the fact that blood-drinking night-demons were infesting the town. Alwyn felt it was his duty to the Lord to root out the monsters and send them on their way away from his home. His approach didn't work so well. He stormed into the Maidstone Inn and decried the townsfolk for harboring servants of the Adversary. He condemned them all aloud and began a reproachful tirade about the fires of Hell and the wrath of the Lord. Manfred, the mercenary, forced Alwyn outside to calm him down.

Alwyn would not have it. He ranted, spitting curses at Manfred, threatening to call down the "sword of God" upon them all. Something inside of the Brujah snapped. The Cainite bashed the clergyman over the head with the heft of his ax, and as the blood hit the snow, the hunger consumed him, and Manfred drank the old man dry in seconds.

Manfred didn't leave the body where it had fallen. He took it out to a farmer's cold, snowed-over field and buried it. It would've remained there, had not someone watched the entire process: the God-fearing wheelwright, Andrew. Andrew dug up the body and kept it for a few days outside his home behind a stack of cut wood until the time was right. Once a month, a procession of Dominican monks would travel Watling Street between Dover and London, escorting more timid (and well paying) pilgrims. Hours before the monks passed through, Andrew left the body in the snow, and it was discovered.

## The Red Order

The frozen remains of Father Alwyn were enough to warrant scrutiny from higher up. It did not take long for a letter to reach the Bishop of Rochester, accompanied by rumors of "black magic" and "the Adversary's work" in the small village of Strood. The letter found its way into the hands of a well favored, opportunistic canon lawyer by the name of Gilbert Rosacroix, who also happened to be a monk of the Order of St. Theodosius and a member of the shadow Inquisition. Rosacroix and his two traveling companions soon journeyed from Plymouth to Dover, and then on to Strood. God's judgment was coming for the vampires of Strood, and they were still unaware that Father Alwyn's body had been found.

## The Inquisitorial Cell

The cell consists of three members of the Red Order, under the command of Gilbert Rosacroix. Sircely and Rosacroix have worked together before; the boy Peter, is little more than an initiate.

### THE COTERIE —

#### JEAN-MARC'S RABBLE

The Cainites in Strood form a small coterie. The Rabble's leader, Jean-Marc, is a wealthy young Ventrue who serves the Toreador Maiselle. Catherine is the daughter of the innkeeper in Strood and is Maiselle's childe. Catherine is somewhat naïve but wields a great deal of influence in Strood through her family. The final member is Manfred, a Brujah with martial experience who has grown quite fond of Strood and its populace.



Gilbert Rosacroix is a cunning, power-hungry man, never without a copy of Gratian's *The Concordance of Discordant Canons* in his hand. In his pride he believes he is a man after St. Theodosius himself, and excising the vampires in Strood would make them all the more similar, as the Red Order's legendary head converted after his battle with an ancient blood-drinker. Rosacroix's *modus operandi* is to throw around canon law and quote from the legal texts of the *Concordance*, pointing them out and lecturing to the ignorant peasants. He bolsters this with the fear that his red robe creates in the hearts of the peasantry. This fear allows him a great breadth of liberty in his actions. The red robes impress upon others the papal authority Rosacroix has as a member of the Red Order. (Irony is, it's this same papal authority that might cut off Rosacroix's power-hungry actions. England's great distance from Rome allows him such freedoms for now.) There is little that Rosacroix feels he cannot get; and more importantly, little he feels he does not deserve.

Next in line is Rosacroix's self-titled second, Henry Sircely. Sircely has no qualms about riding Rosacroix's red coattails and sleeps well with the dreams of power Rosacroix whispers in his ears. Gilbert makes demands and Sircely fulfills them. Sircely is always the one who dirties his hands, the one to drag infidels out of their homes and into the light of the sun. Sircely is not trained in canon law as Rosacroix was, but his expertise in the *Boni Spiritus* more than compensates. He is a cold, steely man from peasant origins who sees the rest of the world as weak-kneed half-wits without the courage even to speak in the face of adversity. Sircely, on the other hand, is more than willing to martyr himself for God.

The most recent addition to Rosacroix's cell is a boy from Winchester simply known as Peter. Peter is an orphan, his father trampled by a horse and mother dead from childbirth complications. The Red Order snapped him up because he displayed the stigmata. Gilbert claims Peter's allegiance not because of his usefulness but because of the positive attention it affords both Rosacroix and Sircely to have such a "God-gifted member" among their ranks. Beyond that, Gilbert uses Peter for simple, brainless tasks despite the boy's apparent intelligence. He is often seen carrying books or tying up the horses.

Aside from the three Red Order members, Rosacroix travels with a cadre of mercenary knights from Rochester and Plymouth. These knights are members of no holy order but are paid well enough to keep their mouths shut and their swords sharp.

## Events

Rosacroix and the others wasted no time upon entering Strood. They entered the village on a cold

January morning and took up immediate residence at the Maidstone Inn. They also came in full regalia. The monks and the attendant knights clothed themselves in the raiment of the Red Order: crimson cloaks and hoods. The whispers began immediately, but the town suspected why these men had come. The town shuddered, for their collective guilt was enough to damn them all. Was Alwyn right? Had they truly allowed — even welcomed — infernal influence to come into their town? Alwyn's outburst condemned them all, and the guilt levied against them felt like a hammer of God chipping away at their minds.

As Peter secured the room and carried their goods upstairs (including small items of torture, weapons, relics of minor saints and alchemical equipment), Rosacroix and Sircely patrolled the downstairs, discussing "law" loudly enough for all who remained in the inn to hear. After a faux-circumspect inspection (which was really little more than fingering dust off of unused banisters and making loud threatening sounds about rooting out heresy to one another), Rosacroix set Sircely and the knights to a single task: Bring townsfolk. Anyone at all. A random collection of six or seven villagers pulled from their fields, or travelers dragged from their rooms at the Maidstone would do. Truthfully, who they were didn't matter. Rosacroix demanded that the job be done in a few short hours, preferably before the sun set. Meanwhile, he would read upon some of the law relevant to demonic heresy while he waited. They would meet just outside the inn proper, near to Watling Road where Alwyn was found dead.

Sircely returned with six villagers: three farmers, one miller and two pilgrims plucked from the Maidstone. This action drew much attention, and many from the inn and nearby gathered outside to see what the ruckus was about. Sircely paraded the collected citizens around, saying nothing. The flash of the red robes and the man with the book (Rosacroix) elicited cries and sobs from the growing crowd. The townsfolk knew then that Alwyn had truly condemned them all.

Rosacroix gave a speech, mixing quotes from the Bible with quotes from Justinian law and the *Decretum*. He used vague terms but always kept in his speech the flavor of accusation. At the end, he declared that he would show them his "proof" of their complicit natures. He brought out Peter, whose hands were dripping with fresh blood. Rosacroix announced that the boy only bled in the presence of treachery to the Lord. The action was met with gasps and further cries as the knights hedged in the crowd.

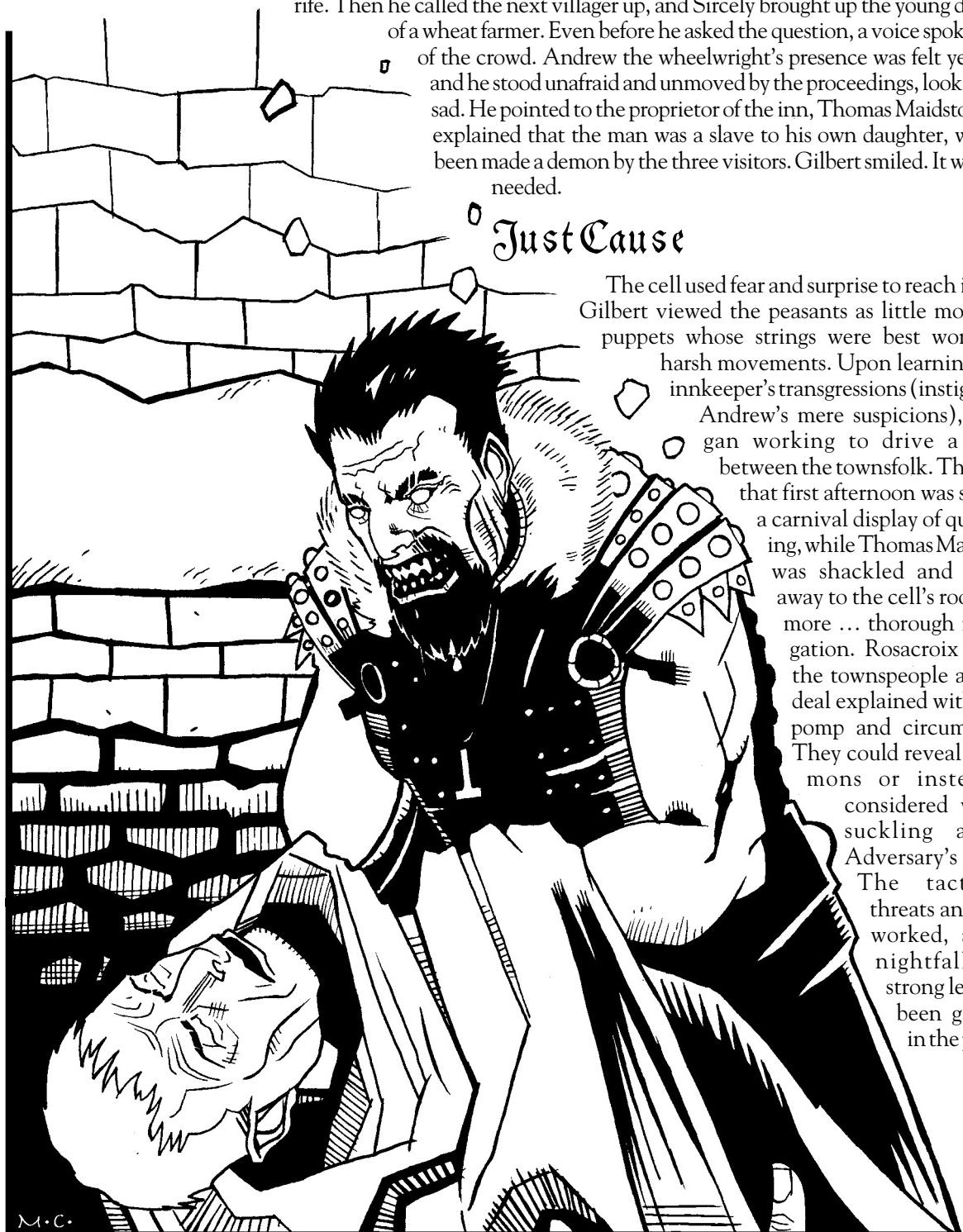
Rosacroix brought the six villagers in front of him, one by one, and put them to the question. The first was a man called Timothy who raised hogs on the outskirts of town. Rosacroix's first approach was literally just a question. He asked, "Are there demons in this town?" Timothy, of course, said no, not that he was aware of.

Rosacroix pulled out an ornate gilded cross and pressed it to his ear as if to listen. He then explained that the cross was a holy relic (which it wasn't) and that, through it, the saints would whisper if they had just heard a lie. Gilbert shook his head and explained simply, "I'm afraid they are whispering." He then said that it was unjust to let liars walk around freely, and Sircely and the knights pinned the pig farmer to the ground, removed the rags the man used for shoes and put a torch to the bottoms of his feet. The screams drove the onlookers to panic; only the presence of the armed mercenaries kept them from running.

Gilbert explained to the crowd that any of them could stop this at any point by coming clean about the presence of demons in the town, as it had clearly been proven that the Adversary's influence was rife. Then he called the next villager up, and Sircely brought up the young daughter of a wheat farmer. Even before he asked the question, a voice spoke up out of the crowd. Andrew the wheelwright's presence was felt yet again, and he stood unafraid and unmoved by the proceedings, looking only sad. He pointed to the proprietor of the inn, Thomas Maidstone, and explained that the man was a slave to his own daughter, who had been made a demon by the three visitors. Gilbert smiled. It was all he needed.

## Just Cause

The cell used fear and surprise to reach its aims. Gilbert viewed the peasants as little more than puppets whose strings were best worked by harsh movements. Upon learning of the innkeeper's transgressions (instigated by Andrew's mere suspicions), he began working to drive a wedge between the townsfolk. The rest of that first afternoon was spent in a carnival display of questioning, while Thomas Maidstone was shackled and carried away to the cell's room for a more ... thorough interrogation. Rosacroix offered the townspeople a simple deal explained with much pomp and circumstance. They could reveal the demons or instead be considered witches suckling at the Adversary's breast. The tactic of threats and terror worked, and by nightfall two strong leads had been garnered in the process.



## Two Birds, One Stone

One piece of the puzzle was all that was necessary to lead the Red Order to the specific location of the Cainites. When one of Matthew's (the village smith's) daughters was pulled to the forefront before nightfall to see if the little girl was "fey-touched" or "infernally despoiled," Matthew had no choice but to speak up. Although he could not publicly declare his love for Catherine, and while the act shattered his heart, he gave up her location to keep his child unharmed, his reputation untarnished and his secret infatuation with her unknown. After all, hadn't Thomas already pointed out her father based on circumstantial suspicions?

While others in the coterie had gone off temporarily to visit Rochester with Maiselle, Catherine had stayed behind with Manfred in their haven down in the root cellar of the inn. Her two brothers were the only initial complication — they guarded the door diligently, young men who would protect their sister at any cost. Of course, neither was martially trained (at least not to the degree that the mercenary knights were) and fell quickly at Sircely's command. Upon entering the room, they discovered Catherine and Manfred waking anew as night settled in.

Manfred was the most difficult to subdue. With great speed and strength, Manfred attacked the knights, killing two of them immediately. Then Sircely stepped in. As the tears flowed down his face, he rooted Manfred to the spot, and the knights took over. They weren't supposed to destroy him, but in a vengeful rage over their fallen companions they decapitated the defenseless vampire.

Catherine confessed in the face of this horror. The girl was naïve and confused, and Sircely sensed this vulnerability. He explained to her that her father had confessed (he hadn't) and was upstairs and "paying for his sins." She bowed to Sircely's will and went along, giving up all hope and loyalty to her coterie.

## Aftermath

The weeks that followed were hard for everybody except the members of the Red Order and Andrew the wheelwright. Gilbert's instincts were right. The fear of Mother Church (and the trepidation instilled by sight of the red robes) was enough to bring the entire town to heel. Many in the town were tortured, and Gilbert sent a runner to the Dover Council of Faith for an execution order for several citizens (though none of the citizens was told exactly why they were being executed, only that they had consorted with the infernal). At least one man died without a trial, however. The head of the town council, Aldrec, confessed to having "connections" to the leaders of the demons, a Cainite called

Jean-Marc. Aldrec was put to the sword outside the Maidstone Inn, where Gilbert informed him that the gilded cross said "he was lying about his innocence."

After a few weeks, Rosacroix put a new clergyman in place, a priest named Father Yerick. Yerick was a middle-aged man who, in his younger years, had been caught with heretical texts and had been exiled to the Isle of Man. Rosacroix pulled him from his exile with the implicit agreement being an alliance between the two, and this agreement was made clear to the townsfolk as well. (Gilbert even left behind a red robe for the priest to don should he need to exhibit authority.) Rosacroix also left behind a small, four-man group of mercenary knights, meant as a reminder of the Church's presence.

The remaining two coterie members (Maiselle and Jean-Marc) learned of the events in Strood and plan never to return. The Prince of Rochester, Harold the Bearded, became wary of any connection that may lead the Inquisition to come knocking down his manor door. He has declared a blood hunt on the two Cainites and has used his influence with the mortal Baron of Rochester to make sure that they are hunted by day as well as by night.

Catherine and her father, Thomas, have gone with Rosacroix and the others back to the Abbey at Plymouth. There, it is intended that both of them will be experimented upon to determine how their infernal gifts can be used against them and others of their kind. It is possible that Maiselle might attempt to track Catherine down and attempt some kind of rescue, but it is unlikely because directly confronting the Red Order would be an inordinately risky endeavor.

## Complications

A few complications exist for Gilbert and his cell. First and foremost is the fact that Rosacroix stepped badly out of his authority during the incident at Strood, particularly in ordering the execution of Aldrec. He was meant to keep his position as a canon lawyer and his membership to the Red Order as separate as possible. Also, the Red Order is known for quiet tactics, not the brash displays of fear and power that Gilbert exhibited. So far he has suffered no recriminations from the rest of the Inquisition, but the Eyes of God never close. It is only a matter of time.

The other complication comes from a rather surprising source: the boy, Peter. Peter is an innocent, and while he embraces the teachings of St. Theodosius with fervor, he does not feel that its practice should be applied in the brutal manner that Rosacroix and Sircely espouse. Peter is currently torn; he knows that he could pass word along of the events in Strood and probably bring trouble down on the heads of his cellmates. Another, darker impulse grows within the boy. Peter ponders whether or not killing Sircely and Rosacroix

would be best, sending them into the hands of the Lord and letting the judgment be divine instead of worldly. As yet he has done nothing, but his guilt and disappointment grow day by day.

## Gilbert Rosacroix

**Nature:** Judge

**Demeanor:** Gallant

**Order:** Red Order

**Background:** Rosacroix was born under the banner of the French aristocracy, his father a discontented lord who had much status but little money. The father sought to wield the burgeoning social power that came with being “nobility” in southern France, and he saw his son as a way to show the family’s potential to the world. By the age of 11, Gilbert had already studied under a team of professorial Glossators (commentators and interpreters of the Justinian code) in Florence, taught specifically in the areas of Church-directed canon law. Already being trained in the arts of language, Aristotelian philosophy, and theology, one of the legists in charge of the university chose to initiate the young (by then, 13 years of age) Gilbert into the ranks of his own order, the Order of St. Theodosius.

Rosacroix took to his learning with passion. The ancient texts, the hint of black secrecy, the talk of Theodosius himself? All of these things invigorated the boy further, pushing him to develop his

body and mind so it required startlingly little sleep to survive. Most of his time until his late teens was spent buried in study, locked away in dark rooms and vaulted libraries, poring through texts. When he finally freed himself from the rigors of learning, he became an official canon lawyer as well as an apprentice in the Red Order and balanced his field time and his interabbey research time as best as he was able. He became so versed in the art of debate and civil law that some actually began referring to him as the “serpent in the Garden” behind his back.

It was five years ago that Gilbert came to England, far from the reach of papal hands, to the lower coast of Plymouth where the Red Order had little authority or membership. He brought with him the initiate Henry Sircely, and there the two worked at research into how precisely to accelerate their own learning and power.

**Image:** Gilbert is not a large man and yet carries himself as if he were. He walks, chin up, with blue eyes bright and scrutinizing. He is often seen in the dress of the Red Order, as he delights in the reactions of people as he passes.

## Henry Sircely

**Nature:** Judge

**Demeanor:** Judge

**Order:** Red Order

**Background:** Sircely was indoctrinated into the Red Order at a very young age but was jaundiced and had a stuttering speech impediment. His superiors thus considered him weak of body and mind. He was often excluded, picked on, even given punishments and penance that had little to do with any of his actions. While he still remained a small boy he began studying with fierce academic determination, however, and even trained in martial skills to act as defense against his bullies.

It worked, to a point. While many remembered his days as a sickly youth and treated him as such, he still forced open doors for himself that eventually allowed him to travel extensively in an effort to learn about (and root out) heresies against Mother Church. Over time, this brought him to Rosacroix’s attentions, who saw a valuable weapon whose knowledge of the arcane and occult could make up for his own lack of ability.

Sircely is content being Rosacroix’s second, as the bullying he took as a youth hasn’t prepared him to be a leader. He accepts Gilbert’s commands and has begun to see their partnership as an “us against them” situation.

**Image:** Sircely is a small man, no taller than f5'6", but he is lean and muscled. His face is bookish and thin, and he has a monk’s cut of dark hair with a bald spot growing. His face is pockmarked from acne as an adolescent.



## Peter

**Nature:** Penitent

**Demeanor:** Caretaker

**Order:** Red Order

**Background:** Peter's parents died when he was young. His mother perished in childbirth, and his father died when he was six years old. The father, a pious farmer from just outside of Winchester, was already grooming his son for the Franciscan Order. The boy was savvy, even at his young age, and learned the lessons of the Church well despite his inability to read. The Red Order fixed that grievance upon the death of Peter's father and took him in and began teaching him in earnest. By the time the boy was 12, he was an expert student, learned in the intricacies of the Gospels (both canonical and apocryphal, the latter of which took precedence in later years) and in the understanding of the infernal influence of the occult.

The boy still held his parents' death as a sticking point in his life, and the very thought of it led to a problem with nightmares. The Red Order used this as a tool, however, and explained to the boy that the reason his parents were allowed to die, and, in fact, the reason that *any* good people were made to die, was because of the presence of the Adversary walking the Earth. Peter held to this point religiously and still believes in it.

Peter began to bleed with the stigmata at the age of 13, and word spread fast of the "prodigy" within the order who carried the major wounds of Christ. Peter could do no wrong, and it was this that attracted



Gilbert to pluck the boy from the abbey and train him under his tutelage (in other words, to use the boy).

**Image:** Peter is a tall, thin boy of 15. He is often bleeding from the stigmata he suffers. Both of his wrists ooze blood, and he even features the rare stigmata of the spear that was supposed to have punctured the side of Christ during his time on the cross. The boy's face is severe, and he always looks sad and distant, as if he is painfully aware of the burden he carries.

## Fields of Blood

Although the main enemies of the Protectorate of Compostela are the Cainites under Prince Reinaldo de Rubio, they are not the only supernatural force active in the region. Several septs of Garou have existed in the environs of the city for the last three centuries (not that the Oculi Dei or the Poor Knights who compose the inquisitorial cells in Santiago would make the distinction between them and the Leeches). The Garou of the Field of Stars Sept have, for the most part, steered clear of the inquisitors' endeavors, having no desire to become involved in another conflict — their ongoing skirmishes against the city's Cainites are enough of a problem. Indeed, the Warders in the Sept of Compostela have forestalled any reprisals against the shadow Inquisition cells despite their ongoing threat to the Garou and their Kinfolk who are scattered over a wide area of Galicia north of the city. In one moment of passion and rage, however, this restraint was torn asunder and a tragedy of epic proportions set in motion.

## The Spark

Three days after Pentecost, soldiers of the Church seized a young woman, Maria Acedo, and her companions a few miles outside Compostela, accusing her of "committing unnatural acts with hellspawn." In fact, the girl and her companions were a group of Kinfolk to the Garou of the Field of Stars Sept, returning to their lands after the celebrations. One werewolf, a young Ahroun called Steadfast-Hill, traveled with them as a protector. Faced with the prospect of confinement and torture for his people's kin, the Garou frenzied and attacked her captors. At first he simply fought like a madman but in short order he changed into Crinos form, seeking to drive off the Church soldiers. Unfortunately, the soldiers appeared immune to the effects of Delirium — they were in fact Poor Knights of Acre acting on information provided by the Oculi Dei — and what ensued was a bloody slaughter from which, to the soldier's chagrin, none of the "hellspawn" survived (Steadfast-Hill included). The carnage did not go unnoticed, however — Maria's lover, a Garou of the Warders of Men named Aurelio Núñez, happened

upon the scene. He arrived too late to save his Kinfolk and comrade but watched the knights carefully, the desire for revenge burning hot in his heart.

That might have been the end of it. Werewolves and Kinfolk faced constant persecution at the hands of the Leeches but, on the advice of the elders in the Sept, had held back, knowing that to act would be to invite greater reprisals. Unfortunately, Aurelio neither cared for restraint nor had any desire to forgo his vengeance. As one of the Golden Wheel Camp — the itinerant Warders who plied their trade between Galicia's cites — he was less insightful and cautious than other members of the sept and for all his physical prowess lacked the intellect to appreciate the ramifications of his actions. The next day, Aurelio ambushed a pair of knights patrolling El Camino de Santiago, albeit Knights of Santiago rather than members of the Poor Knights of Acre (not that he appreciated the distinction). War had been declared between the Protectorate of Compostela and the Field of Stars Sept, though neither party was yet aware of it.

## The Pogrom

In response, the knights moved into the countryside in considerable force, marching steadily toward the Sar Valley that was the heartland of the Field of Stars Sept. Their treatment of those they encountered in the Upper Sar valley was brutal, and though none of those targeted was Garou, a number were Kinfolk to members of the Field of Stars Sept. Combined with the previous massacre, the sept — whose members guarded a caern of Leadership near the river's headwaters — took this as the challenge it was and struck back.

The church soldiers seemed amused that “peasants” were prepared to stand up to them, seemingly expecting a quick victory. This confidence did not last, particularly when — with battle joined — a number of peasants transformed into Hispo and Glabro forms. Some of them turned and fled while others were carried from the battle when their mounts panicked. The Warder known as Ramon Grassrunner had realized that the attackers’ greatest advantage was their horses and led a mix of Garou and wolf Kinfolk leaping into their midst.

Not everything went the werewolves’ way, however. Upon seeing the effect of the Garou on horses, an Ahroun known as Marta Spite-Tongue sought to scare off the human foes. She shifted into Crinos form, believing the Delirium would cause her opponent to flee or cower in terror. She was thus extremely surprised when the knight she was facing didn’t even flinch at her appearance, and their blades cut her down before she could react. Nonetheless, the knights quickly realized they were outmatched, and as casualties mounted on both sides, their leaders ordered the retreat.

## Interlude

The Sept did not immediately move against the Poor Knights though they did send individual werewolves into the city to keep a close watch on their enemies. What they learned was of immense interest to Augustín Rodriguez (called Brother-to-Stone), the sept leader. It appeared that the leader of the Knights of Santiago blamed the Poor Knights for the debacle in the Upper Sar — only a third of the detachment of the Knights of Santiago survived the encounter, compared to almost all of the Poor Knights — claiming that the Poor Knights’ bad planning and overconfidence were responsible for the death of his men. To his mind, nothing else could explain how peasants had driven off a party of knights, and he was likewise disturbed by reports that the Poor Knights themselves had wielded some form of magic in the battle. Were they saints or some malignant force clasped to the bosom of the church? Many of the Knights of Santiago backed away from the Poor Knights, their wariness combining with that of their leader to reduce the Poor Knights’ available allies drastically just when they needed them most.

## The Assault

While some of the Garou were satisfied that their defeat of the Knights would secure their position — at least long enough to relocate to a place of safety — though some at the moot that followed the battle argued for taking the fight back to inquisitors. Chief among these were Rebecca Broken-Claw, a Ragabash Bone Gnawer; the Ahroun Warder Ramon Grassrunner; Beatriz Silverfur, a Galliard; and Ruiz al Rashid, a Philodox of Moorish descent more commonly called Walks-the-Wind. Each argued that unless the enemy was kept off balance it would strike back swiftly and heavily, inflicting an intolerable price. Brother-to-Stone was loath to challenge the forces in Santiago, not least because of the Leech presence in the city, which some thought might be behind the Church’s sudden interest in the Garou and their Kinfolk. Eventually, however, these opponents submitted and the four advocates were given leave to form the Swift Hunters Pack, also incorporating three other Warders: Alberto Strides-the-Stars, a Theurge and cousin of Maria Acedo; Lucita Suarez (Leaps-from-Shadow), a Galliard and sister of the fallen Spite-Tongue; and Hunter-in-Storms, a Lupus Ragabash. While Grassrunner led the pack, it was Broken Claw and Hunter-in-Storms who tracked the Knights back to their commandery, which they observed for several days in an effort to study the place’s routine. An Umbral assault, they realized, would not be practical — the knights had so filled their area with their faith that the Umbra surrounding the commandery was painfully bright and the spirits there unfriendly to the Garou. To assault the compound in the Realm, however, required them to pass the compound’s stables, kennels and mews to reach

## THE PROTECTORATE OF COMPOSTELA

Santiago de Compostela is one of the holiest sites in Christendom. It is the third most significant pilgrimage site for the faithful, ranking behind only Jerusalem and Rome, with a series of routes—El Camino de Santiago—crossing northern Iberia. This significance draws a variety of agencies to the city, and it is no surprise that the Inquisition has established a foothold. This is not, however, a unified presence but rather two distinct groups, ostensibly working together as the Protectorate of Compostela.

The first is the Poor Knights of Acre, who work in close cooperation with the Knights of Santiago and other military orders both in the city and along El Camino de Santiago. Their leader is the grizzled Knight-Commander Baltasar Delgado, whose years of experience — most notably in the Albigensian Crusade — make him a force to be reckoned with. Sir Raphael de la Vega serves as Delgado's lieutenant, a more dashing (if somewhat less pious) warrior than his superior but nonetheless a capable knight. The third Poor Knight of note is Sire Fantino di Milano, a former Hospitaler whose main duty is to oversee the hospice and orphanage the Poor Knights maintain at their commandery, located a short distance outside the city. Approximately a dozen other Poor Knights of lesser status serve in Compostela.

The second group is a loose association of Oculi Dei scattered throughout the city. Their notional head is Doña Ignacia Navarro de Souza, a young and

wealthy widow. The Doña believes her husband died at the hands of the “fiends” that prowl Compostela’s nights and works systematically to unravel the Enemy’s influence in the city. An agent known only as Fortunato is able to obtain a wide variety of information on the city’s seedier side. Fortunato is, in fact, the most senior member of the Oculi Dei in the city but is prevented from exerting any influence on his comrades by his (or her — Fortunato’s identity is shrouded in mystery) residence. The Carrillo brothers, Ramiro and Ganzalo, complete the Oculi Dei cell, Ramiro operating a pilgrim tavern while the younger Ganzalo is a clerk in the Cathedral. The members of the Oculi Dei cell do not meet each other face to face but instead communicate via messages left in a series of places around the city.

The threat against which the shadow Inquisition members are aimed is the numerous Vampire sects operating in and around the city. Their principal foe is the Cainite Prince of Compostela, the Lasombra Reinaldo de Rubio. As ever with Cainites, a complex web of intrigue exists around the prince. Most notably, however, Reinaldo is enamored of Doña Ignacia and plans to Embrace her. Fortunato is aware of this — he (or she) resides within the prince’s household — and is in fact using the Doña as a lure. What is less clear, however, is how much Reinaldo knows of the shadow Inquisition and its plans in the city.

the Knights’ main halls, something the Rage-filled Garou would be unlikely to do undetected. Instead, they decided that Walks-the-Wind would enter the compound disguised as a lone pilgrim and from there use his Gifts to silence the dogs and horses.

The pack’s attack on the Knights’ dormitory was swift and brutal, with several of the junior knights and non-knightly residents brought low before they could act. While the early success of their assault proved heartening, the martial prowess of the Knights soon made itself felt. Not only were they trained warriors but some of the Poor Knights were able to bolster their strength nearly to match that of the Garou attackers, as well as fortifying their minds against the Delirium. Leaps-from-Shadowfell to the sword of Baltasar Delgado while attempting to avenge her sister, but not before she had badly wounded the Knight-Commander. Broken-Claw also fell to the knights’ blades, but the vicious Ahroun took several more with her into death. With the pack increasingly hard-pressed within the halls, Grassrunner withdrew to the courtyard where Walks-the-Wind, still maintaining his control over the animals of the compound, turned them on their

erstwhile masters. As the knights were forced to defend themselves against their own beasts, the Swift Hunters withdrew to lick their wounds.

The attack had been a mixed success for the Garou. They had slain a number of junior knights and non-inquisitors, sowing immense confusion in the commandery, but had failed to bring low the group’s leaders and had lost two of their own. Something still needed to be done about the Knights, but another direct assault was not the answer.

## Assassins of Body and Mind

Over the next week, various people in Compostela began to have nightmares in which the Knights of Acre featured prominently. In the dreams, the knights butchered pilgrims and used their bodies in satanic rituals, committing a range of unspeakable acts in which they bowed down before a great idol of the Prince of Lies. At first little reaction to this occurred — the dreamers were disconcerted but unsure as to the dream’s meaning — but as the numbers experiencing the nightmares grew, eventually several found each other and realized that something

was dreadfully wrong. Indeed, a number believed that the nightmares were visions from God, sent to warn the people of Compostela as to the perfidy of the Poor Knights. The surviving Knights suddenly found it very hard to purchase supplies and were shunned wherever they went — none of the locals was willing to confront the Knights, but that didn't mean they had to help them. This campaign was, of course, the Garou's doing, with Beatriz Silverfur using her Galliard Gifts to manipulate dreams. Worse was to come.

Late one afternoon following six weeks of such dreams, Silverfur allowed one of the knights to see her change to Lupus form, prompting a chase into the heart of the city, the winding Rúas around the cathedral. Their presence caused something of a stir — the Poor Knights were not a common sight in the city, and the stories of the dreams had led to considerable distrust — but Sir Rafael de la Vega, who led the pursuit, was not about to let "hellspawn" escape his grasp once more. Silverfur led the knights a merry chase, threading in and out of the crowds of pilgrims who looked on warily, but upon entering the main square slowed to allow the pursuers to catch up. She then took a calculated gamble — she knew that these soldiers of God could harden their minds against the Veil — and howled, turning her Gifts on the Knights' deputy leader. Silverfur sought to provoke their leader into a berserk anger. She succeeded and de la Vega drew his sword, hacking at those around him, friend and foe alike. In the confusion, Silverfur stepped into the Umbra and escaped.

Rafael's brief but bloody rampage lead to the maiming of three pilgrims and was enough to convince the Poor Knights that the lieutenant was insane. With the pilgrims, however, the effect was more pronounced. The dreams of the Knights' corruption seemed to be borne out by de la Vega's frenzy, in which he appeared more like a beast than a man of God. Within a few hours, the other martial orders in the city moved against the Knights' commandery, where they found a scene of bloody carnage.

While de la Vega and his companions had chased Silverfur through Compostela, Grassrunner had led the rest of the pack in a strike at the leadership of the Knights. From their vantage point overlooking the commandery, the werewolves stepped sideways, traveling a short distance through the Umbra before emerging in the Knights' assembly hall. Over the course of the "dream campaign," the aura of faith surrounding the commandery in the Umbra had waned. Although it was not completely gone, the Garou found that they could enter the hall and step back into the Realm without too much difficulty. Within a few moments, they had found their prey — the Knight-Commander — and engaged him in bloody combat. Delgado was a superlative warrior and a skilled initiate of the myster-

ies attendant to the Poor Knights of the Passion of the Cross of Acre, but he could not hope to prevail alone against four powerful and determined Garou. He fought bravely but was soon brought low, his body torn asunder by the violent attack. Sir Fantino di Milano, the head of the Knights' humanitarian mission, was slightly more fortunate, hearing the battle between Delgado and the Garou, thus having time to prepare himself. He mortally wounded Walks-the-Wind but eventually succumbed himself. The remaining Swift Hunters set about making the commandery an object lesson to those foolish humans who would challenge the Garou, slaughtering the few pilgrims who remained in the hospice as well as all but three of the children in the orphanage. Carrying Walks-the-Wind, whose life was fading fast and would die before they reached home, the pack set off to rendezvous with Silverfur.

## Aftermath

As a result of the slaughter in the commandery and de la Vega's "possession" in the Rúas, the other military orders in Compostela moved to suppress the Poor Knights. The Inquisition retained a presence in the city in the form of the Oculi Dei but could only gather information, not act on it. By the time the inquisitors sent a follow-up expedition to the Sar Valley, Brother-to-Stone had organized the relocation of the Kinfolk to safer lands, leaving little beyond a number of recently abandoned farmsteads as evidence of their existence.

At the end of the bloody clash, neither the werewolves nor the Inquisitors could claim to have won a victory. Both had sacrificed too much to the conflict and would be many years recovering. Indeed, the only group in the city that benefited from the carnage was the Cainites. Fortunato, still hiding in the house of Prince Reinaldo, wondered how informed the canny Lasombra was of the war between the Poor Knights and the werewolves ...

## The Swift Hunters Pack

All of the surviving members of the Swift Hunters Pack are Warders of Men, bound together by their desire to bring vengeance for the knights who massacred their Kinfolk.

### Ramon Grassrunner

**Breed:** Homid

**Auspice:** Ahroun

**Tribe:** Warders of Men

**Rank:** Athro

**Background:** The undisputed alpha of the Swift Hunters, Grassrunner is a formidable warrior with almost two decades of experience leading Garou in battle. In his years of warfare he has been called

upon to fight a wide variety of foes, notably Leeches and magi, but in more recent years forces of the Church. He is forthright in his opinions and tolerates no insubordination but also knows his own weaknesses and when to delegate.

**Image:** In his mid-thirties, gray streaks run though Grassrunner's long dark hair — also appearing in his Crinos and Lupus forms — combining with his weather-beaten skin to add several years to his age. He is, nonetheless, a handsome man, with powerful muscles and proud bearing, though a pair of scars down his left cheek and across his chin spoil the image somewhat. Even in Crinos form he is far from the largest Garou in the pack but makes up for it with his dexterity and cunning.

## Beatriz Silverfur

**Breed:** Homid

**Auspice:** Galliard

**Tribe:** Warders of Men

**Rank:** Adren

**Background:** Despite her relative youth, Beatriz is a thoughtful Garou, constantly judging when to fight and when to use less direct action to achieve her goals. This mix of caution and strength earns her great respect from the sept elders, and Brother-to-Stone believes that she has a great future. Silverfur's arguments were a major factor in the sept's decision to form the Swift Hunters, and Beatriz is acknowledged as the beta of the pack, second only to Grassrunner.

**Image:** Despite her name, Silverfur is a fairly youthful Garou, being only in her mid-twenties,



though her hair is already shot through with gray, which becomes even more pronounced in her Crinos and Lupus forms. Hardened by a life in Sar Valley, Beatriz is well muscled and adept at combat, her torso crisscrossed by a series of scars from the numerous battles she has fought.

## Alberto Strides-the-Stars

**Breed:** Homid

**Auspice:** Theurge

**Tribe:** Warders of Men

**Rank:** Fostern



**Background:** A cousin of Maria Acedo and the others slain at the outset of the conflict, vengeance is the driving force behind Alberto's decision to join the Swift Hunters. He has sworn that the knights will pay in blood for their crimes. Grassrunner is unsure that the Rage-filled Fostern has the clarity of mind necessary to defeat the Church soldiers in their own den but is unwilling to deny the Theurge his right to seek redress.

**Image:** Strides-the-Stars is a slim young man, barely twenty, but is already wise in the ways of Gaia, ever-alert to his surroundings, seeing many things that his companions miss. Unlike many of his packmates he has blonde hair that he keeps short and also endeavors to grow a beard, with mixed (and, to his packmates, humorous) success. His Crinos form is wiry but no less powerful than his companions, while his fur in all forms retains its golden sheen.



## Hunter-in-Storms

**Breed:** Lupus

**Auspice:** Ragabash

**Tribe:** Warders of Men

**Rank:** Fostern

**Background:** The youngest of the pack — only 13 as humans reckon the years — Hunter-in-Storms has nonetheless had a lifetime's experience of hunting and battling agents of the Wyrm. He is a superlative tracker and quiet killer, though he is wary of attempting to bait the Church soldiers in their own den.

**Image:** Large by wolf standards, Hunter-in-Storms is sleek and well muscled, his long dark fur rippling as he walks. He moves with a grace that belies his strength, allowing him to surprise — lethally in most cases — his prey. In his Homid form, he appears as a fit and handsome youth with dark, darting eyes.

